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SINGLE
TRACK

DOUGLAS GRANT

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THE SINGLE TRACK



The single track railroad was indeed assuming form and a semblance of reality

THE SINGLE TRACK

BY

DOUGLAS GRANT

AUTHOR OF

"THE FIFTH ACE," "BOOTY," etc.

Frontispiece by

DOUGLAS DUER



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THE SINGLE TRACK

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CHAPTER I

YEARS OF DISCRETION

JANETTA crossed her pretty feet and then considering that posture undignified for an attorney's office, uncrossed them again and jingled her platinum mesh bag in impatience much as a child would twiddle its pencil in the last trying hour of school.

"I came because you said I must, Uncle Andy, but it's perfectly silly to talk to me, for I don't understand a thing about mines and stocks and dividends!" She glanced with a little pout at the lawyer's dour face. "Besides it's my birthday, and I think it is mean——"

"It is precisely because it is your birthday, my dear Janetta, your twenty-first birthday, that it is necessary for you to take your mind from frocks and frills and flummery long enough to try to understand your financial situation," Andrew Geddes interrupted sternly. "You are no longer a child in the eyes of the law and the time has come for you to take an active and intelligent interest in your own affairs."

Janetta glanced at the jeweled watch on her slender wrist and sighed. She would certainly be late for that

luncheon! Then hopefully she favored Mr. Geddes with a swift, engaging smile.

"But Uncle Andy, I prefer to leave everything in your hands and Ollie's; I do, really! You've always managed so splendidly since grandfather died that I would much rather just trust you."

"You'd trust anybody, if it saved you from bother and responsibility!" the lawyer snapped, but there came a little tender twinkle into his shrewd eyes. "It won't do you a bit of good to smile at me like that, Janetta Gildersleeve! You got my watch away from me that way and smashed it when you were a matter of three years old, but you can't wheedle me now. Of course, you'd rather leave everything in my hands and go on leading your butterfly existence; but you may find that it will last just about as long as the existence of a butterfly does! What then?"

A certain grimness had crept into his tone, the twinkle disappeared, and Janetta looked again at him in bland bewilderment.

"What do you mean, Uncle Andy?" she asked wonderingly. "A butterfly lives about six weeks, doesn't it? What has that got to do with dividends and things?"

"I mean, Janetta, that sometimes property depreciates, and dividends stop coming." Andrew Geddes paused and then added: "You must try to understand my dear—do you even know what a dividend is?"

She nodded brightly.

"Of course, Uncle Andy! It's the money from the mine, and it comes every three months and I get my share on the fifth——"

"And spend it!" Mr. Geddes interrupted. "Now suppose that next dividend didn't come; what would happen?"

"Oh, I should be most fearfully in debt!" Janetta shrugged. "You would probably give me a dreadful scolding and countermand the order for my new car——"

"New car!" There was a note of exasperation in the tone he had tried to keep very gentle, and he brought his hand down emphatically upon the desk top. "There'll be no new car! Now, Janetta, listen to me. I tried to explain to you a year ago about the formation of the new Northern Star Mining Company——"

"You did!" agreed Janetta tearfully. "You explained till my head ached and all I remember is that the Northern Star is a new copper mine at some unpronounceable place in Alaska and that Ollie and I own it, though it isn't called the Gildersleeve Copper Company any more. I don't see why. Grandfather——"

"The Gildersleeve Copper Company failed a year and a half ago," Andrew Geddes said slowly.

"Failed!" Janetta repeated in a whisper. The flippant, petulant look was gone. "But that was all we had! Where did the dividends come from since?"

"Yours, you mean, my dear." The lawyer spoke with unwonted gentleness once more. "Against my better judgment you have received your same allowance regularly, but it came from your brother's share of the capital that was saved from the wreck."

"Oh, I love Ollie for it, but you shouldn't have permitted him to do it! You ought to have told me! You

know I would never have taken his money, like a selfish little beast!" The words came in a quick sobbing rush. "So that's why he sold his polo ponies and his racing car! If I had only known!"

"He never meant that you should. He wanted you to have all the fun you could, but there are more important things in this world than fun and it is time you learned the truth. Before your brother went to France I was weak enough to allow him to persuade me against my better judgment, but now I feel that the situation must be revealed to you."

The girl whirled upon him. Her blue eyes, still wet with tears had narrowed swiftly, and her soft chin stood out in belligerent firmness.

"Uncle Andy, you said that my allowance had been paid from Ollie's share of what was left. Have I a share, too?"

The old man nodded, watching her keenly.

"Of course. An equal share, but yours is intact."

"How much have you given to me since the failure?"

"Um! Let me see." He paused. "Six quarterly dividends at six thousand; a matter of thirty-six thousand, my dear. The Gildersleeve Company was rated before the smash-up came at well over a million and your brother wouldn't cut you down."

"Well, Uncle Andy, I want you to take thirty-six thousand dollars from my money and pay it straight back to Ollie!" Her eyes flashed and then changed quickly as she saw the look upon his face. Her voice came falteringly, almost in a whisper once more: "You mean—you mean that I haven't thirty-six thousand left?"

"My dear, you may have a mere pittance—or millions. It all depends upon the next three months." The lawyer drew forward a chair and patted it reassuringly. "Sit down and try to compose yourself. You haven't asked me yet how the failure came about."

"It doesn't matter, does it?" The girl cried as she sank limply into the chair. "As long as it did happen——"

"It didn't 'happen'," Andrew Geddes remarked crisply. "It was brought about deliberately, relentlessly, by a man who carried his enmity against the family down to you children;—Gordon Winfield."

"Heavens! And I danced with his son Ronald at the Cheevers' last night!" Janetta exclaimed, adding viciously: "I—I wish I had trodden on him!"

"I didn't know you knew him." The lawyer's face had darkened.

"I don't; I met him then for the first time and I—I didn't like him!" She flushed. "What caused the enmity between our family and Gordon Winfield?"

"When your father was alive and in the mining game with your grandfather, they caught Winfield in a crooked deal and threw him out of the company. He prospered as such rascals sometimes do, and became a formidable adversary. He's been after us for a long while and finally he got us. You wouldn't understand the details now; it is enough that we fought fair and he—didn't." The lawyer removed his glasses and tapped the desk thoughtfully with them as he went on: "We saved enough from the wreck, however, after reserving your allowance for a limited period, to purchase the new,

undeveloped Northern Star mine, which had just been discovered up near Katalak. We sent experts there and their report was more than favorable; your brother went up himself last spring and looked it over—you remember, he was there when we declared war and went in for his commission immediately upon his return. We bought the Northern Star, forming a dummy company under the name of the mine itself."

"And it's—it's turned out to be not any good after all?" Janetta asked, with a piteous little droop to her lips.

"On the contrary, it is a wonder!" Mr. Geddes retorted dryly. "But you see, Janetta, it is thirty miles up country in the mountains. We need a railroad to get the ore down to Katalak Bay, and wharfage there for steamers to take it to the smelting centers at Tacoma."

"Then build one!" Janetta's foot tapped the floor impatiently. "Haven't we enough money, Uncle Andy?"

"It isn't that, my dear. But another mine has been discovered not far from the Northern Star, and the company which owns it, the Unatika, also want that railroad into Katalak and waterfront properties there."

"Isn't there room enough for two? Goodness, I thought Alaska was big enough!"

Andrew Geddes shook his head.

"Only one can have the right of way and the company which establishes its railroad first obtains possession. If the Unatika Company beat us to the port we can have no transportation facilities and the Northern Star will be unworkable. They are trying to do it, by fair

means or foul, because they know that if they succeed we will have only one recourse left—to sell the Northern Star mine to them at their own price. And that means virtual ruin.”

He had explained patiently as though to a child and Janetta sat motionless, her eyes fixed upon the square, bronze-framed calendar on the desk from which the date “April 23rd, 1918” stared uncompromisingly back at her. A tiny red spot was beginning to glow in her cheeks and at the last words she tossed her head.

“But we are going to beat them, aren’t we? We’re going to get our railroad established first?”

“I don’t know. We are going to try our level best, but they are endeavoring to beat us by fair means and foul; mostly foul. There’s queer work going on up there, crooked work, Janetta. These Unatika people will stop at nothing to gain their ends.”

“Who are they?” Janetta’s tone was undaunted, but one hand went to her breast as though she felt a little sinking sensation there.

“A group of copper operators here in Wall Street. They have always kept within the law but they have been mixed up in so many shady transactions that they have no standing among the big fellows, although they are sound enough as far as capital goes.”

“Like Mr. Winfield?” She paused and then asked suddenly: “Is Mr. Winfield one of them? I mean, is he in this Unatika Company?”

“Good Lord, no!” The lawyer stirred impatiently in his chair. “They are just a ring of the smaller fry.”

“What sort of—of crooked work are they doing?”

“Well, we have had a lot of delays and accidents, too many to have occurred in the natural course of events. I am convinced—although we have no actual proof—that the Unatika people bribed our engineer. Anyway we sacked him and now I am sending up a younger, less experienced chap to take charge. He seems efficient and he has a good clean record; all we can hope for is that he will maintain it.”

Janetta twisted her watch bracelet about on her wrist reflectively.

“Are you positive that those mishaps weren’t real accidents?” She looked up at the lawyer. “What makes you think that the Unatika Company want the Northern Star any more than we want their old mine? If we win out, won’t we have them in the same position as that into which they are trying to put us?”

Andrew Geddes chuckled.

“There spoke your grandfather! I knew his blood would show out in you sooner or later underneath all this society frippery! Yes, my dear! If we win out we’ll have them at our mercy, but we’ll play fair; they won’t. That is the difference. As to their wanting the Northern Star, they have tried to juggle it away from us by every other means under the sun. Now it has come down to a race for that railroad. We are ahead of them, so far, in spite of their chicanery; we have our equipment partly assembled, but that is all. The real work hasn’t begun.”

“But it will take money, heaps and heaps of it, won’t it? I don’t mean only the railroad and wharves but developing the mine itself.” Janetta clenched her small

fists. "That thirty-six thousand—oh, you shouldn't have given it to me! You ought to have told me before, and so should Ollie! I feel like—like a criminal!"

"We didn't need it, my dear," the lawyer assured her consolingly. "There are a few thousand left still of the amount we had set aside for your allowance and we were sure that the Northern Star would begin to pay dividends, real ones, before that was exhausted. It would, too, if it hadn't been for the interference of this Unatika crowd. Now, if our road isn't established first, all the money you have spent would have been of no use in saving the Northern Star."

"Well, there will be no more spent!" Janetta declared with vehemence. "I'll countermand the order for my new car myself, and I'll sell my electric and the little roadster, too. It's funny I didn't hear of the failure of our own company; goodness knows I hear all the other gossip of our set. I suppose no one dared mention it to me when they saw I was keeping everything up just as we always had. I believe Persis Cheever did try to talk to me once or twice about economizing, but I only laughed at her!"

"No one but Winfield himself knew how closely we had been driven to the wall." Andrew Geddes smiled grimly. "I took care of that. Most people thought we closed out to reorganize."

"They won't think so any longer." Janetta's chin became once more in evidence. "When I told you that if the next dividends, as you let me believe them to be, were stopped I should be fearfully in debt I didn't mean that I had spent all the last; I meant for what

I intended to buy. Now I am going to close that big house; it's been ridiculous, anyway, to keep it open all this long time that Ollie has been away. I'll get rid of Mrs. Everton; I've been more of a chaperone for her than she has for me, anyway," Janetta continued. "I can go to stay with the Cheevers for a while until we know how the road is coming out."

"You are right," Andrew Geddes replied emphatically. "If we lose to the Unatika crowd you cannot begin to retrench too quickly. That was why I decided that you must be told to-day; I thought you had it in you to be sensible. Not that I believe they will succeed in their game, but I don't count on a thing until it has gone through, and with your brother fighting off there in France I did not dare take the responsibility of keeping you longer in ignorance. I don't want you to be downhearted, though, my child. Our equipment will all be assembled before theirs has begun to arrive, and then the fun will commence."

Janetta drew a deep breath.

"Can you trust this young engineer you are sending up there?"

"We must," the lawyer responded tersely. "We can only hope that he is on the level and has nerve and brains enough to put the road through in spite of them. Try to retrench all you can, and I will take care of you."

"Don't worry about me, or the mine either!" In spite of her efforts her voice had begun to tremble and her smile wavered, but it was with a smile, for all that, that she faced him as she rose. "Our road will

go through, I know it, and when Ollie—when Ollie comes back, we'll both be rich! Uncle Andy, may I go now, please? I—I want to go home."

"Yes, my dear. I'll see you to-morrow." Andrew Geddes' own voice was suspiciously husky, and he averted his face as he fumbled with some papers on the desk before him.

Janetta took his hand and gripped it very tightly for a moment, but no words came. Then she turned, her small head held high, and walked slowly from the room.

CHAPTER II

THE I. W. W. THING

THE luncheon given in her honor was wholly forgotten, and when she reached home Janetta crept to her own room and burst into a flood of tears. Being a very human girl and having known little beyond the butterfly existence of which Andrew Geddes had spoken, she felt a sense of flat desolation. Her brother had had to go to war, of course, but to have had everything swept away from her in this past year; her brother, and now her home, the comfortable income which had seemed as sure as the ages! It was too awful, and on her birthday, too!

A maid tapped with patient insistence at the door, summoning her to the telephone, but Janetta only sniffed and told her to go away. An hour later a more authoritative knock sounded, and with a sigh the girl rose and admitted an older woman, tall, and sinuously slender, whose delicately pretty face was marred by an expression of petulant impatience.

“Good heavens, Janey! What on earth do you mean by sulking in your room and refusing to answer the ’phone and spoiling Persis Cheever’s luncheon? It was most embarrassing and everyone——” Mrs. Everton paused, and her manner softened quickly at the sight

of the girl's tear-stained face. "Why, my dear! What has happened?"

"I have a frightful headache, Adele." Janetta turned away from the other's searching eyes. "And I'm terribly lonely without Ollie on my birthday. Nothing seems to matter, somehow. I—the world is just simply turned upside down. He's all I have, you know."

"You have *me*," Mrs. Everton ventured plaintively, but she sighed as though that fact were not a wholly welcome one for her own contemplation. "With all these war charities and things which have kept you busy from morning to night I should think you could manage to kill time quickly enough until it is all over and he comes back."

"It isn't only that." Janetta's tears had long since ceased and the new look of firmness born of the revelations of the morning had returned to her face. "I don't want to kill time any longer. I want to make use of it, Adele; make it count for something. I should like to go in for some real, practical war work, to feel that I were helping, too; helping Ollie."

"I think that is a splendid idea." Mrs. Everton's face lighted and she went on with suspicious enthusiasm. "Now, if you could get in some nice, clean, really smart private hospital, and take a course in nursing——"

"Nursing?" Janetta eyed her curiously.

"Oh, I don't mean the messy part, of course, but reading to the convalescents and arranging flowers, and smoothing their foreheads and being nice and comforting generally," Mrs. Everton explained vaguely but eagerly. "It is quite the thing now, you know, and

so much more feminine than the motor corps. Heaps of the nicest girls have taken it up. There is a three-month's course—intensive, they call it—and you could stay right there at the hospital——”

“Adele, do you mean that you have other plans for yourself?” Janetta interrupted her suddenly. “You are tired of our arrangement? Of chaperoning me, I mean?”

“Heavens, no, child! Whatever put such an idea into your head? I wouldn't think of leaving you, especially now while Ollie is in France.” There was a hurried insincerity in her protestation which confirmed the girl's thought.

“But if Ollie were here?” Janetta queried.

“Well, I thought it would be nice if you decided to take up hospital work for the next few months. It would occupy your mind and all that, and then if you stayed there for the course you wouldn't need me.” The lady paused in evident confusion and added: “You see, a friend has asked me to take a long trip West with her in her uncle's car; but it really doesn't matter. I should not have mentioned it——”

“Why not?” Janetta spoke very slowly. Had Mrs. Everton an inkling of the truth? Was she deserting the sinking ship? “The change would be splendid for you, Adele.”

Mrs. Everton flushed.

“I wouldn't dream of it under the circumstances, my dear! I declined twice, but Grace Winfield is so insistent——”

“Grace Winfield?” Janetta repeated sharply.

“Yes. We were at school together, although she was

in a younger class. I don't think you know her; she has been living with relatives in Baltimore since the war drove her home from abroad. You met her cousin Ronald last night."

"Then she is Gordon Winfield's niece? It is his private car in which you are going West——"

"But I am not going, Janey! How can you think I would leave you alone?" Mrs. Everton cried reproachfully.

"It really doesn't matter about me and I think it is a trip which you would enjoy," replied Janetta. "I won't need a chaperone for the next few months, in any case. We'll talk it over with Mr. Geddes when he comes to-morrow. Whether I go into hospital work or not I mean to do something real and I shan't have any time for social things."

The mention of the Winfields had sealed her lips as to the other change which had come into her life. Whether Adele Everton had been aware of the actual failure of the Gildersleeve Company and its cause or not, it seemed to Janetta that the other had gone over to the erstwhile enemy, and although nothing more than a surface fondness existed between the girl and her professional chaperone she felt a fresh pang of sundered ties. She would have been compelled, in any event, to dispense with Mrs. Everton's social services and she tried to console herself with the thought that the way had been providentially paved for her, but it brought no comfort.

Everything that had been familiar and commonplace and secure seemed all at once to be sweeping from her on a resistless tide and the shock left her bewildered

and numb. The future which only that morning had appeared so certain as to merit no consideration now loomed blackly before her, a hideous waste of desolation with unknown pitfalls of loneliness and possible poverty, and she could only gaze upon it with a blank stare of unbelief.

Yet when Mrs. Everton had left her, all other thought was crowded from Janetta's mind by the prospect of her brother's possible return to face financial ruin. He had not only gone to the supreme hazard, but his very absence at this crucial time in his affairs placed his future, if he did return, in jeopardy. Woman-like, she lost for the moment the greater vision in the lesser, nearer one. There were so many who had set their houses in order and left with a high heart secure in the future if death passed them by, but what if Ollie were to return maimed, perhaps, to find himself ruined and her a useless burden on his hands?

Janetta sprang up and paced the floor of her room. Ollie would come back to her, whole and sound; she must not permit herself to think of any other possibility. And the road would go through, up there in Alaska! That new, young engineer could not fail! Her remembrance of Ollie's sacrifice in providing for her from his own capital during the past anxious months brought a blur of tears to her eyes, but she brushed them angrily aside. She would show him, and Uncle Andy, too, that she was not the mere butterfly they thought her. She would learn to do some real work and then if that horrid rival company did swallow up the Northern Star mine, after all, she would prove herself a help and not a burden!

That she was totally untrained in any but the social graces which her position demanded of her Janetta did not stop to consider; she only realized with an unprecedented revulsion of feeling that the whole order of her existence had become shallow, futile and odiously repugnant. Even the dinner dance which was being given in honor of her birthday that evening and to which she had looked forward even after a long and crowded season with joyous anticipation, now seemed an ordeal impossible to be faced, and impulsively she called up her prospective hostess and pleaded an indisposition, much to Mrs. Everton's disgust when that lady heard of her decision.

"It is ridiculous for you to take Ollie's absence on your birthday in such a silly, tragic fashion!" she exclaimed. "It is positively selfish to spoil everyone else's pleasure. Ollie would be the last to want you to make a martyr of yourself."

"My remaining at home need not interfere with you, Adele," the girl responded rather wearily. "I really want to be alone, if you don't mind, and I will just have something sent up on a tray——"

"On your birthday, of all times!" Mrs. Everton shrugged. "I never found you difficult to understand before, but I must say your moods are beyond me to-day."

She departed and Janetta dined miserably alone in her room. If this was what it meant to reach years of discretion, this sudden heaping up of troubles and responsibilities and downright disaster, then she wished with all her sore heart that she had never had to grow up! Why couldn't she buck up and be brave and un-

selfish? Was she really only the butterfly, one of the army of women whom a hothouse existence had made useless and utterly frivolous?

The sense of self-disgust brought with it a combative spurt of energy, and the silence of the house seemed to stifle her. If she dared she would send for the little roadster and go for a long spin alone in the cool night air. Mrs. Everton would be horrified, of course, but a chaperone would soon be of small moment in her life, and no one need ever know, anyway.

She 'phoned for the car, then slipping on a warm coat and heavy veil she stole down the stairs. Caution was useless, however, for Peddar, the old butler who had served her grandfather, came padding along the hall, looking the question he was too well trained to ask.

"Has the car come yet?" Janetta spoke with assumed indifference.

"Car, miss?" Peddar's tone was respectfully inquiring, but he eyed her with the same look of suspicion as when he had caught her in the pantry years before. "I wasn't aware that Mrs. Everton was to send it back——"

"I mean the roadster," Janetta interrupted.

"Roadster?" Peddar repeated, his eyes bulging. "Oh, miss, does Mrs. Everton know?"

"She doesn't, and neither do you, Peddar," Janetta informed him firmly. "There's the car, now. You haven't seen me leave my room."

"Very good, miss." Peddar's accents were resigned, but he sighed lugubriously as he closed the door after the exit of his young mistress. To his mind this nocturnal expedition boded mischief.

The little car ran like a breeze, and the soft spring air was as exhilarating as wine to the girl's drooping spirits. She headed north, skimming daringly between and around the occasional careening taxis, and when she reached the outskirts of the city unconsciously increased her speed, her thoughts busied with the difficult months before her.

She did not realize that the time was passing even as her little car was eating up the road ahead, and that the lights were diminishing in the suburban cottages she flew by. When at length the lateness of the hour dawned upon her, she was far on the Post road and to return the way she had come would take a longer time than she cared to consider.

Just ahead she knew that there was a short cut, narrow and deeply rutted from the frost of the late winter, but every inch of it was familiar ground to her, and she decided to chance it.

She swung about the sharp turn and bumped along over the rough road, her mind once more fixed upon her own problem. Yet had she but known it, a decision was upon her far more immediately momentous than that of her problematic future. The road was dark and narrow and densely tree-lined, and no warning save a belated shout reached her consciousness as she swept around a forgotten turn, head on into an approaching car.

There was one alternative—a mad dash into that tree-bordered side path. Even as the headlights of the other car flashed into her eyes, the girl gritted her small teeth and flung the wheel over.

The dark pillar of a tree trunk rose menacingly be-

fore her and instinctively she swerved to avoid it, setting her brakes with a reckless disregard of gears, then femininely closing her eyes to await the inevitable smash-up. But it did not come. Instead, above the shriek of protesting metal there reached her ears a sharp human cry, a hideous crunching, and the roadster came to a stop with its headlights a bare inch or two from a stone wall.

She heard a volley of shouts and imprecations, and opened her eyes to see the other car speeding away, its occupants vociferating their indignation until their voices were lost in the distance.

She had missed them by a miracle! But if they were unhurt, what had that horrible cry meant which still rang in her ears?

Janetta glanced behind her and saw that at the foot of that tree which she herself had just escaped a dark huddled form lay, while a tall figure bent above it, and groans in a reassuringly hearty voice burst upon the air.

"Get out of that car and bring a lamp here!" a voice ordered none too gently. Its accents bore traces of unmistakable education, however, and Janetta climbed out of the roadster and meekly complied.

As the lamp flashed upon the pair beneath the tree, the standing figure straightened with an exclamation of surprise.

"A girl, eh? Might have known it would take a woman to turn a fool trick like that."

Janetta's blue eyes flashed angrily up into a pair of contemptuously stormy brown ones and then down to the man lying at her feet, and a little cry of horrified contrition escaped her.

"Oh, is he dead?"

The question was obviously superfluous, for the deep groans issuing from the unshaven lips of the fallen man had continued with unabated fervor, but they gave way now to speech.

"It's killed entirely I am! What is this country comin' to when a decent man can't lie down f'r a bit of a sleep without the rich comin' along and ridin' over him? My head's broke and my back—ouch! Call f'r th' ambulance, call f'r the police——"

The accents were thick, and as she bent over him the reek of liquor assailed the girl. She drew back, relieved but still shuddering, for there was a cut upon the man's stubby chin which to her frightened gaze seemed like a murderous gash.

"I don't think he is badly hurt," the young man who had called to her volunteered. "We'll lift him up and see. If you will take his arm——"

"Oh, I couldn't!" Janetta drew back instinctively. "There—there is blood all over his face——"

"Afraid of it, are you?" The young man's tone was almost deliberately insulting in its contempt. "You caused it, you know. But keep back; don't soil your hands! I can manage without your help."

"But I want to help!" Janetta wailed indignantly. "You have no right to speak so to me! I—I never saw blood before; anyone hurt like this, I mean. I have my purse back in the car. I'll give him some money——"

"That *would* be about your idea of practical help, wouldn't it?" The young eyed her with open insolence, yet of a curiously impersonal sort. "Stand aside, please."

As he assisted the tramp to his feet it was evident that the latter individual did not share the younger man's contempt for financial amelioration. His small eyes gleamed avidly at the girl, and he mumbled:

"Hand over the money. I'm hurt bad and I could make a lot of trouble for you, young lady, but if you give me a good big wad I——"

"Here, none of that!" the young man interrupted, but Janetta had already flown back to the roadster. She had left the motor lamp on the ground by the tree, and she was compelled to fumble about for a moment or two before her fingers touched the cold meshes of her platinum bag.

When she returned she found a first aid kit lying beside the lamp, and saw that the young man was giving the finishing touches to a neat white bandage about her victim's head.

"He'll do now," the former announced, adding hastily: "Here, what are you doing?"

For the girl had opened her bag and was pouring its contents into the grimy outstretched hands of the tramp. The young man deliberately took it from her, ignoring alike her exclamation of surprise and the protestations of the eager recipient.

Stooping down to the light he counted the bills, selected two and handed them to the tramp, returning the rest to the bag.

"No, you don't!" The surly voice was raised menacingly. "You gimme the wad, or I'll have the law on the young woman for runnin' me down. I know my rights——"

"Please give it to him!" Janetta pleaded with unac-

customed meekness. The accident had shaken her out of her usual poise, and she had never met anyone quite like this rude, masterful young person who treated her as if she might have been just nobody. "Give him all of it and get rid of him, if he really isn't hurt!"

"I am hurt, and bad, too!" the tramp asserted. "You gimme that money or it'll be the worse for the two of you!"

The young man apparently had not heard Janetta's urging cry. His brown eyes were flashing ominously as he faced the tramp, and pointed down the road.

"There's a place where you can get a drink and a bed about a quarter of a mile that way," he said shortly. "That's all the money you'll get, and if you don't beat it without any more talk I'll hurt you worse than the lady's car did, savez?"

To Janetta's amazement the tramp, after one threatening glance, picked up his battered hat, placed it ludicrously atop the immaculately bandaged head, and turning, made off down the road.

With his going a measure of composure returned to Janetta, and with it a sense of resentment against her companion. As he handed the bag to her she nodded distantly.

"Thank you," she said with pronounced hauteur. "It was quite unnecessary for you to interfere in my gift to that poor man, however."

"You were going to give him over two hundred dollars." The young man seemed in no way discomposed by her change of manner. "I'll get your car back into the road for you——"

"Please don't bother!" she interrupted frigidly.

"Nonsense! You can't do it by yourself. You have no right to be riding about the country alone at night with all that money, but I suppose it doesn't mean much to you." His tone was maddeningly cool. "If an officer had come along and that fellow had had you arrested for running him down, it would probably have cost you a lot more, though. The judge might have made an example of you. It doesn't do to go around running over people, you know, even if they are only tramps."

"You don't think I knew he was asleep there behind that tree, do you?" Janetta demanded angrily, forgetting her dignity in her resentment. "I had to avoid crashing into that other car——"

"You wouldn't have, if you had been on the right side of the road," her tormentor interrupted in his turn. "That's the trouble with you society women; you think you can do anything you like and get away with it, but the rules of the road were made for everyone, even the common people."

"You—you I. W. W. *Thing!*" Janetta exclaimed wrathfully, but the young man had turned abruptly and left her. She watched him speechlessly as he rolled the light roadster out into the road and started the motor with a practiced hand. When he returned and picked up his first-aid kit, she saw for the first time that a motor cycle stood against the wall a few feet away.

Then he remembered her lamp and came forward, but she snatched it up and retreated to her car. Courtesy demanded that she thank him for his undeniable services, but all that she could bring herself to accomplish was a stiff little bow.

"Good-night," he said cheerfully. "It doesn't really

matter what you think of me, of course, but I don't happen to be a member of the Brotherhood, as you called me. I'm just a workingman."

"Good-night," Janetta found herself repeating, and then angry that she had been betrayed into that small concession she jumped into her car and sped off into the darkness.

CHAPTER III

JANETTA DECIDES

THE next day Janetta's best friend, Persis Cheever, found her dry-eyed and resolute of face, perched upon the end of her chaise-lounge with a pencil and a paper which contained a formidable row of figures.

"What in the name of goodness are you doing, Janey?" she demanded.

"Adding," replied Janetta succinctly. "I'm trying to find out what I've spent in the last month and where it has all gone to. I'm glad you came, Persis; I want to have a serious talk with you. I am going to work."

"That is what every one of the girls in our set are saying, my dear," Mrs. Cheever responded lightly. "It's only a spasm. You'll get over it."

"But a lot of them have done things and are doing them now splendidly," protested Janetta. "Motor corps and nursing and cooking and waiting on people in the service huts, and even clerical work in Washington."

"Can you cook?" Mrs. Cheever demanded with the frankness of intimacy. "Heaven help the boys who would drink your coffee; I know, for I've tried it. Can you run a typewriter or take shorthand, or manage an office? You know you are not sufficiently strong for nursing, and if you think you can run a car efficiently enough to join the Corps——"

"Oh, I know I can't!" Janetta closed her eyes with a shudder, as visions of the escapade of the night before returned to her. With them came unaccountably the memory of those flashing, rudely contemptuous brown eyes, and the hint of hidden mockery in the voice which assured her that its owner was a "workingman."

"Well, then," Mrs. Cheever resumed, "don't be silly and start something you can't finish."

"Of course, he couldn't have been!" Janetta observed in absolute irrelevance. "Not with that well-bred voice, in spite of his impertinence——"

"Janey, what *are* you talking about?" her visitor demanded. "Whose voice, and who was impertinent?"

"No one," replied Janetta in some confusion, adding hastily: "But, Persis, there must be something of real practical use that I can do."

"Oh, yes, of course," Mrs. Cheever admitted helpfully. "You can dance and ride and swim and play golf and tennis; all of them passably, but they are not much in demand just now. The most practical thing that I have ever seen you do well was to sell goods over a counter at the Red Cross bazaar. I believe you could sell anything to anybody if you once fixed your mind on it! But do give up these heroic ideas and just play about with the rest of us. Knit and roll bandages if you like, but for Heaven's sake don't try to go in for anything that you have had no training for."

When her friend had left her Janetta sat with cold dismay clutching at her heart. Persis had spoken with brutal candor, but in truth; there was nothing that she could do, nothing that really counted. For the first

time her uselessness was borne in upon her, and Janetta shuddered at the future. There were plenty of trained women, no doubt, for the great work in hand, but what of herself and her own future? What if the mine in Alaska actually fell into the enemy's hands; must Ollie return to find her a helpless burden upon him?

Persis Cheever's careless words: "The most practical thing that I have even seen you do well was to sell goods over a counter," returned to the girl's mind and she shivered at the thought. To be a shopgirl! She, Janetta Gildersleeve! Was that the possible future that awaited her?

Then her thoughts turned again to her brother and his sacrifice for her, that she might not know until the last possible moment the burden of anxiety and care that had weighed upon him for the past year and more, and a passionate longing to help him rose again within her.

If only she might go to Alaska in his stead! If only she had paid attention when Uncle Andy had tried so patiently in the past to tell her something of the mines from which she had so indifferently drawn the luxuries of her futile existence!

The announcement that Mr. Geddes was in the drawing-room interrupted her reflections and Janetta descended with her mind filled with her new idea.

"Uncle Andy," she began impetuously, much to that good man's amazement, "why doesn't someone else go up there to the mine in Ollie's place, and watch over the work?"

"The mine! You're a real Gildersleeve, after all!" the old man chuckled.

"Uncle Andy, why couldn't Mr. MacLeod leave the office here in charge of someone else and go up there? If the road doesn't go through there won't be any need of a New York office, will there?"

Andrew Geddes shook his head soberly.

"We have thought of all that, my dear," he said. "Adam is a good man, and staunch and dependable as they make them, but he couldn't see beyond the length of his own nose—though the Lord knows that is long enough in all conscience! He only knows the office end of the game, not the practical workings of it on the ground, and what we're up against there is guerrilla warfare, no less! I'd go myself but I'm too old and I find my perceptions are not so keen as they used to be. If that new young engineer is all that his record seems, he's loyal and honest to the backbone, and efficient enough, too, although this is his first real chance. There is no one who can take Oliphant's place. We'll just have to trust in the Lord and Barney Hoyt."

"Is that the new engineer's name?" Janetta asked. "I think it is rather nice, don't you? It sounds dependable, anyway. Just what would Ollie have done if he had been here in America and able to go to that place—what is its name?"

"Katalak," Andrew Geddes responded. "He would have kept his eye on things and put a stop to the crooked work of the Unatika people."

"But that sounds so vague," Janetta objected. "Of course, his presence as the owner of the Northern Star might have had a sort of restraining influence on those horrid people that own the other mine, but——"

"It would not," interrupted the lawyer grimly. "It

would have brought open warfare. And remember, Janetta, that no one knows a Gildersleeve is connected with the Northern Star Mining Company. We want to wait and spring it on old Winfield and his crowd when there is no chance of his jumping on us again. We are out to do him, my dear, just as the Unatika people are out to do us, only we fight fair; we want to catch him here on the market when we have got something back of us to fight with, and put him out of business."

"Then if Ollie had gone up to—er, Katalak, isn't it?—he would have gone as somebody else, and under a different name?" Janetta asked slowly, her brow wrinkled in a thoughtful frown.

"Exactly, my dear. Hoyt would have known him, of course, but he could have been depended upon to keep the secret."

"Surely others at the mine would have recognized him, too," Janetta observed, adding: "When Ollie was there with the expert last spring——"

"There would not have been need for him to go near the mine," Andrew Geddes interrupted again. "No work is going on there now; no more can until the road goes through. There is no working force there, only a guard of picked men to see that the Unatika crowd do not start some mischief in the mine itself. The real job lies thirty miles away, down in the town of Katalak on the waterfront, where the road building must start. Oliphant would have lain low and studied the gangs, to see if there was a man among them in the pay of the Unatika people; he would have gotten in with that crowd too, if he could, and tried to find out

what crooked work they were planning, in order to stop it in time."

"But isn't there any law up there, Uncle Andy?" This time Janetta raised her eyes. "If they are caught causing any of these so-called accidents that have been happening, can't they be put in prison?"

"The nearest representative of law and order is the United States Marshal at Juneau, as I understand it," replied Andrew Geddes dryly. "And they are under cover, remember; they are much too clever to be caught in any overt act at this stage of the game. It's rough work, my dear, and rough characters putting it over; they would stop at nothing short of murder, and if they could get away with that under the guise of 'accident' they would not hesitate to wipe out any man who stood in their path."

"The new engineer; would they murder him in cold blood?" Janetta demanded in shocked amazement.

The lawyer shrugged.

"He is taking his own chances," he replied. "He knows what he's up against, and I think that young man can be depended upon to take care of himself in an emergency."

The lawyer chuckled again, and Janetta said impulsively:

"I should like to meet him and talk to him before he goes. Couldn't you bring him up, Uncle Andy? Is he—the presentable sort?"

"There spoke this generation!" Andrew Geddes snorted. "Your grandfather, my dear, would not have asked if the man who was sweating blood and risking his life in his service was 'presentable,' I'll have you

know! Any man who worked for him and fought for his interests tooth and nail would be plenty good enough to break bread with him!"

Janetta hung her head, but more from force of habit when facing her erstwhile guardian's customary scoldings than from contrition at her question. That rude young wayfarer with his horrid socialistic ideas returned again to her thoughts and she shuddered. Could her benign old grandfather really have held with a like doctrine? She glanced up at Andrew Geddes with a trace of mischief in her eyes.

"I don't remember meeting any horny-handed sons of toil at grandfather's table here, Uncle Andy, but do bring this Barney Hoyt to dinner, anyway; I don't care if he eats with his knife or not! It will be a good experience for Mrs. Everton."

"Thanks, my dear, but he'll not be able to accept your kind invitation," the old man responded witheringly. "He is not hanging around New York waiting for society to take him up—he is on his way out to his work now, and within two weeks he'll have it started full blast."

"Oh, I hope he succeeds! I don't mean it so much on my own account as on Ollie's. It would be dreadful to have him come home and find everything gone!" She paused, and then added: "Uncle Andy, I meant every word I said in your office that day when you told me the real condition of affairs. I am going to close up the house here almost at once. Peddar must be provided for, of course, but the other servants must go."

"And Mrs. Everton?" queried the lawyer.

"Mrs. Everton has already given notice." Janetta

smiled with a little crooked twist to her lips. "She is going on a trip West, and Uncle Andy, who do you suppose she is going with? The Winfields!"

"Not—you don't mean Gordon Winfield?" Andrew Geddes glared in astonishment.

Janetta nodded.

"In his private car; his niece, Grace Winfield, invited her." She hesitated and added slyly: "Mr. Winfield himself is a widower, isn't he?"

The lawyer nodded in his turn, but his face was very stern.

"He would be a rare catch for the Everton person, but I'm wondering if there may not be something else back of it. You have not mentioned the Northern Star to her, have you, Janetta?"

"No. Besides, she told me of her decision, in a nice tentative way, of course, yesterday, just after you informed me of the existence of the Northern Star."

Andrew Geddes still frowned.

"I don't like it," he said at last. "If I had known that she was a friend of the Winfields, she would have been sent packing long ago."

"But, Uncle Andy, one cannot discharge a chaperone like a housemaid, you know——" Janetta began.

"There are spies enough at the mine; we want none in the household," he retorted. "Has she ever mentioned them to you before?"

"No. She and this Grace Winfield were at school together, I understand, but they haven't seen much of each other of late years. Aside from spoiling the surprise you want to spring on Mr. Winfield in the stock

market later, what would happen if he should learn that the Northern Star is really owned by Ollie and me?"

"He would find out who owns the Unatika mine if it cost him half he possesses, and spend the other half buying in on that proposition, just to have a hand in winning out once more against the Gildersleeve blood!" the old man announced impressively. "You have no conception of what an implacable enemy he is. He drove the old company to the wall and he's waiting now for you and Oliphant to live out the last few thousand you managed to save from the wreck so that he may see you in poverty! I'll wager that he is laughing in his sleeve at this moment because your brother has been for so long in the service, thinking that he will not have even a chance to try to recoup."

"What a—a beast!" Janetta clenched her hands. "His own son, that Ronald, didn't go to war, I observe! Uncle Andy, why do you suppose they are all going West just now?"

"Winfield owns mining property from Nevada to the coast; he takes a trip out every summer," replied Andrew Geddes. "The best thing you can do, Janetta, is to close the house and let Mrs. Everton go as soon as possible. I've never approved of the lady, as you know, and I would not put it past her to accept a commission from Winfield to try to find out if there is anything in the wind—if you have invested the money any way that he might get at it, or whether you are just living on the capital, hoping for something to turn up. To tell you the truth, that was one of the reasons I consented to your brother's extravagant plan to pay you your supposed dividends from the capital—in order to fool

Winfield and let him think you were living the remains of your fortune out."

Janetta's brow wrinkled.

"I don't quite like it, Uncle Andy," she said. "This skulking and hiding from an enemy—I don't think it would be grandfather's way, do you? Why not come straight out in the open, let everyone know that we Gildersleeves own the Northern Star, and dare Mr. Winfield to rob us of it if he can?"

"It would not be your grandfather's way, provided he had equal weapons to fight with, my dear, but when he was fighting against such an unscrupulous enemy as this he could prove himself the canniest old Scot alive, and did many a time." He rose. "You don't understand about these things, and I should not have told you all this, but it was a positive pleasure to me to see you take an interest at last in the things which concern your own future. I suppose it isn't natural to expect a young girl like you to have a business head on your shoulders, so just think no more about it. I've no doubt but that the road will go through all right, and a year from now the Northern Star will be paying dividends enough to buy you all the pretty things your heart desires. But when you close up here, where will you go, Janetta?"

"Oh, the Pembrokes have asked me out to Great Neck for June, and the Carterets want me to come to them at Southampton, but I think I shall just stay in town with the Cheevers for awhile anyway," Janetta responded indifferently. "Don't worry about me, Uncle Andy. I shall let you know, of course, what I decide.

I will come down to see you about settling up affairs here."

When Mr. Geddes had taken his departure, Janetta paced the floor deep in a new and daring thought which had come to her. He would never permit it, of course, nor would Ollie, but would it be necessary for them to know? Surely some plan would present itself by means of which she could escape the care and watchfulness that had hedged her in all her life, and prove, if only to herself, that she was not the useless parasite she seemed.

•There was nothing here for her to do; she could not indefinitely accept her friends' hospitality, nor could she face, false though such pride was, the thought of the hypocritical sympathy which would surround her at the news of her changed fortunes.

But she could and would take Ollie's place herself! Whatever the Katalak of her vague and shrinking imaginings might prove to be, whatever the trials and privations and dangers that might assail her, whatever the difficulties that stood in her path, Janetta had come to a decision. She would go to Alaska!

CHAPTER IV

THE FAR TRAIL

THE office of the Northern Star Mining Company was a modest and inconspicuous one, in an antiquated building huddled between two towering skyscrapers on a narrow, alley-like side street which just invaded the outskirts of the financial district. No prospective investor had ever passed through its grimy door, rarely was mail slipped beneath it, and indeed it remained locked for days at a time until the entire office staff, in the person of Mr. MacLeod, put in a periodic appearance. The Northern Star Mining Company was quite obviously lying low.

The day after Janetta had reached her decision chanced to be the occasion of one of the managerial visitations, and Adam had scarcely seated himself behind the incongruously massive mahogany desk—a relic of the defunct Gildersleeve Copper Company—when to his amazement there came a swish of silken skirts and clicking of tiny heels down the musty hall, and a dainty white gloved hand tapped at the not immaculate glass panel of the door.

Ever a punctilious man, Adam MacLeod rose and flung it open with an angular flourish.

“Madam, you have made a *mista*——” The words died in his throat, and his lean jaw dropped when he beheld the apparition which confronted him.

"No I haven't this time, Mr. MacLeod, though I thought I should never find the right place!" Janetta glanced about her and sniffed. "And is *this* the office of the Northern Star! It isn't very much like the old days, is it?"

"It will be again, Miss Gildersleeve," responded the amazed manager staunchly when he could find his voice. "This is only temporary, you know."

"I know." Janetta nodded. "Until the road goes through—if it does!"

"You know, then——"

"Uncle Andy told me." Janetta dimpled suddenly. "May I sit down, please? And you used to call me 'Janey,' if I remember."

"Excuse me!" Adam wheeled forward one of the huge leather armchairs and surreptitiously wiped it with his sleeve. "You've grown to be such a big young lady now, that I hardly see the little Janey in you."

"I am glad you appreciate that fact, Mr. MacLeod, for I have come to talk business with you." Janetta seated herself gingerly, and smiled upon him.

"Did Mr. Geddes send you to me?" the manager asked with native caution.

"Oh, no, indeed!" she replied sweetly. "He doesn't even know I came, and he isn't going to know. This is strictly confidential."

Mr. MacLeod looked alarmed.

"But wouldn't it be better—I mean, if you went to him he could tell you more about what you want to know——"

"How do you know what I want to know if you won't let me tell you?" Janetta's smile clenched the

unanswerable argument, and she went on: "He has told me everything there is to tell about the Gildersleeve failure, and Gordon Winfield's part in it, and all about the new Northern Star and the Unatika people who are racing us and fighting us for the single-track road down to Katalak. Now, what sort of a man is this new construction engineer, Barney Hoyt?"

Her glibness had taken Mr. MacLeod's breath away, but at the sudden question his eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"Well," he began slowly, "I've always been at the office and—er, Janey, and I don't pretend to know the field operations, but he seems all right to me. A bit young for so much responsibility, maybe, but they tell me that he's a capable engineer, and he looks to be a good fighter. He's keen for the work and acts as if he were going to eat it up. We'll just have to wait and see how he tackles it when he gets up there."

"A capable engineer and a good fighter," Janetta repeated. "But that isn't all we need, is it? Do you think he is a young man to be trusted?"

"You mean, can he be bought out by the Unatika people? Not in a thousand years, Janey! I'm a slow body to bank on any man's character, but if young Hoyt had a yellow streak he would have shown it on his last job. It was a bridge in Canada, and I know for a fact that he was offered thousands, and a position that he couldn't work up to in ten years in his profession if he would turn a crooked trick with it."

"He refused?"

"And beat the man who approached him with the offer within an inch of his life! That's why Mr. Geddes selected him for this job over more experienced men."

"You know, of course, that if Ollie hadn't entered the service he meant to have gone to Katalak himself without anyone except this engineer knowing that he was the owner of the Northern Star, and watched to prevent the Unatika people from injuring our road?" Janetta asked, after a pause. At MacLeod's nod she went on: "Uncle Andy says that there is no one to take his place, no one to sort of make friends with the men so that they wouldn't be suspicious and find out if there is not a traitor perhaps among our own employees who has enabled the Unatika people to cause so many of these so-called 'accidents' which have delayed the work at the mine."

"That's so," the manager agreed. "It's hard enough to find men for any sort of work up there now, let alone a confidential job of this kind. The war has taken most of them."

Janetta drew a deep breath.

"Women have taken men's places all over the country," she said slowly. "Isn't there some sort of a 'job,' as you call it, that a woman could do? I don't mean manual labor or clerical work either exactly, but something that would bring her in touch in a plausible way with the men employed?"

"Well, I don't know as to that," MacLeod rubbed his chin reflectively. "I did hear from the general superintendent that they were hard put to it for an assistant storekeeper, but I hardly think he would consider a woman for the post."

"What is an assistant storekeeper?" Janetta's eyes were shining.

"Why, the company—your company—maintains a

sort of general store right at the works where the men can buy what they need—clothing and tobacco, and razors and candy and all that. The storekeeper takes care of the ordering of supplies and the books and the assistant sells the stuff to the men. But what in the world put the idea in your head of sending a woman up there, Janey? No woman would be any matter of use, especially now that there's trouble and likely to be more."

But Janetta had not heard the query. Persis Cheever's words of the previous day returned once more to her thoughts and this time they brought no misgiving. The one practical thing that she could do well was to sell goods over a counter!

"Mr. MacLeod," she rose, and going to him held out her hand, "I want your solemn word of honor that what I am going to say to you now you will never repeat to Uncle Andy or my brother when he comes back, or—or anyone."

The gaunt figure rose also and a bony hand gripped hers.

"Of course, you have my word, Janey. I'll tell no one. But what——"

"I'm so glad." Janetta drew herself up to her slim height before him. "Because, you see Mr. MacLeod, I'm going up there myself! I'm going to be that assistant storekeeper!"

"You're—you're daft!" Adam MacLeod's pale eyes seemed fairly to pop out of his head. "You go to that rough mining town, a young lady that's been brought up as you've been! It would never be allowed for a

moment! A dainty young thing in a hole like that! You cannot know what you are saying, Janey!"

"Nevertheless, I am going, and you are going to help me," Janetta announced, and the Gildersleeve chin was very prominent now. "No one will know who I am and the Unatika people would never suspect a woman spy. Besides what better chance would anyone have to get in with the men——"

"It couldn't be done, not by a lady——" the horrified manager was beginning, but she cut him short unceremoniously.

"I'm not going as a lady! I'm going just as an employee of the company like themselves. You can fix it for me——"

"Never while there's breath in my body!" declared MacLeod vehemently. "You don't know what you're talking about, Janey! You haven't the least conception of the sort of men you would come in contact with; and the women in a place like that! Whatever put such a daft notion into your head?"

"Mr. MacLeod, what are you doing here in this dingy little office that a fifteen-dollar-a-week clerk could run? You, whose services would be worth many thousands a year to any mining stock company on the Street?" Janetta demanded unexpectedly.

MacLeod gazed at her in a bewildered fashion.

"Why, where else would I be while there's a Gildersleeve?"

"That is just what I mean!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "Don't you suppose we realize what you are sacrificing for us because you feel that you are a part of us—because you have been with the company

all your life? Are you going to fail us now? There's work up there that only a Gildersleeve can do. My brother is doing a bigger thing and I must take his place. Oh, can't you see! Uncle Andy treats me still as a child but I thought you would understand. He wants to keep me wrapped in cotton wool all my life, but I have my grandfather's blood in me, and I'm going to prove it! I'll come to no harm, Mr. MacLeod; the men may be rough and all that, but I can take care of myself. Don't you see I've simply got to go?"

MacLeod shook his head stubbornly.

"It's unthinkable," he said. "I'll be no party to any such outrageous scheme!"

"Very well." Janetta walked a few steps away and then suddenly whirled upon him. "I suppose you know that I'm twenty-one years old, that I am half owner in the Northern Star mine, and that nothing on earth can prevent me from going up there and being my own store-keeper if I want to? If you try to stop me, if you give me away to anybody you will be a traitor to the company!"

"But Janey!" pleaded MacLeod, "you don't realize what the life is up there, I'm telling you! You couldn't—you wouldn't be safe! I ought to be shot if I lent myself to such a mad whim!"

"Then don't!" retorted Janetta coldly. "I imagine the general superintendent will recognize my authority if I find it necessary to take him into my confidence!"

"I'll go to Andrew Geddes——" declared the harassed MacLeod.

"You can't!" Janetta fairly danced a step or two in her jubilation. "You gave me your hand and your

solemn word of honor that you wouldn't tell a single soul!"

"You took advantage of me!" MacLeod pounded the desk indignantly. "I might have known you were up to some mischief when you walked in here this morning! Rather than have it on my soul that I helped you to take such a reckless, dangerous step, I'll—I'll order the general superintendent to exclude all women from the payroll of the company—and he'll think I have gone clean daft, for never a woman has applied!"

"You do, and I'll go to Katalak if I have to go as one of those dance-hall girls!" Janetta's eyes were blazing now, and at his shocked gaze she added with confident assurance: "Oh, you needn't think I don't know all about things up there; I've been to the movies! I tell you I mean to go and try to protect Ollie's property and my own if I have to walk every step of the way!"

MacLeod groaned and dropped helplessly into his chair.

"I know you are of age, Janey, but just stop and think for a moment. What could you do? Suppose you should find decent lodgings, which I very much doubt, you'd be on your feet all day, cooped up in a rough-board shack behind a counter selling blankets and plug cut to a lot of ruffians who at the least would be making eyes at you! You wouldn't see a thing that was going on outside or understand it if you did!"

"They work sometimes, don't they?" asked Janetta slyly. "I didn't suppose they had all day to do their shopping in, and I guess I could stand their making eyes at me—other men have, you know! Besides, you could help me——"

"I could! Away off here in New York!" MacLeod exclaimed in bitter sarcasm.

"You could order the head storekeeper, if that is what you call him, to lay in a stock of extra nice things in the line that the men most require, and sell it to them below cost—a better grade of tobacco I mean, nicer candy and clothes. What nationality are they, for the most part?"

"Italians and Russians and Hungarians and Chinese, I believe," he replied almost mechanically, staring at her as if he thought she had taken leave of her senses.

Janetta clapped her hands.

"Oh, good! I know just the sort of things to appeal to them that I'm sure the storekeeper never even thought of!"

MacLeod's own national prudence asserted itself.

"But why below cost?" he inquired. "We would be losing money for no purpose. The men are satisfied now——"

"Because they can get nothing better. If that Unatika company are so mean as to try any crooked trick to delay the building of our road, it isn't probable that they treat their men as well as we do, is it? Their company store may be selling them more inferior stuff and cheating them at that. Now, if you could just suggest to our storekeeper and whoever is superior to him that it is the owners' wish that the men of the other company be allowed to sneak in now and then and buy something—they mustn't know they are being allowed, you see, they must think that we mistake them for some of our own men——"

"Great stuff!" ejaculated MacLeod. "You mean to

win them over, undermine their satisfaction with the people they work for——”

“I mean to fight fire with fire!” Janetta declared, her blue eyes snapping. “Short of actual crooked dealing, I mean to play their own game and beat them at it! I have some money of my own left from my last quarterly allowance, and I’ll leave it with you to pay for the extra goods. If Uncle Andy comes snooping around to find out what it means, supposing that young engineer or the superintendent or somebody should write to him about it, just tell him that it is a little experiment you decided upon yourself.”

“Janey, I should never have suspected you of such duplicity!” MacLeod groaned in shocked sincerity. “How are you going to explain your absence, supposing that I should consent to listen for a minute to your wild notion? Mind, I haven’t said that I would! It would be a fine scandal to get out in society that Miss Janetta Gildersleeve was missing!”

“I haven’t decided yet on the details, but they will come to me,” Janetta responded serenely. “I have a girl friend who will help me out. Of course, I shall have to fib to her, too, but I don’t want a person on earth to know where I am but just you.”

“I can’t do it!” MacLeod rose precipitately once more. “I got carried away for the moment by that scheme of yours to win the men of the other company over, but it is no use, Janey! When I think of that place, and every man of them taking his life in his hands with that murderous gang after them and then think of you all alone up there, exposed to all the dangers they are and

a thousand worse, I—I can't take the responsibility! I'll break my word first, and go to Andrew Geddes!"

Janetta read defeat in the stern implacable lines about his grim mouth, and with a wisdom beyond her years forbore to urge her cause further. Instead she sat for long minutes lost in demure reflection, while the unhappy MacLeod paced the floor hoping fervently that she would go without making a renewed attack upon him.

All at once a swift gleam of inspiration flashed across the girl's face, and a little smile flitted for an instant about her lips. It was gone with the next breath, and she said meekly:

"Mr. MacLeod, will you help me to go if I promise to take someone with me who is years and years older than I am and deadly—I mean, *eminently*—respectable? Someone who is perfectly qualified to look after me and see that I don't get into any mischief? Someone whom we can trust to keep our secret absolutely?"

"Who is it?" He eyed her suspiciously. "Is it someone your brother and Andrew Geddes approve of?"

"It is someone they both love; at least, Ollie does! But I shan't tell you unless you promise first, for you have been so mean about my going alone beside threatening to break your word! Of course," she added sweetly, "you realize that your going to Uncle Andy wouldn't make the slightest difference if I were really determined to act without your help, except to make a lot of trouble for both of you, for even Ollie couldn't prevent my going, I have a half interest in the mine, as you know. However, I would so much rather do it with your approval!"

"Ahem!" MacLeod temporized. "You say someone who is much older, and able to take care of you, and your brother trusts her? We-ell, I promise."

"And you promise not to *break* your promise?"

He nodded solemnly, and Janetta gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"I knew you would agree!" she said blandly. "Only, it isn't a 'her.' I shall take Peddar!"

"Peddar!" exclaimed MacLeod in dismay. "I might have known you would play some trick on me! What earthly good would that doddering old butler of yours be to protect you in a rough crowd like that?"

"I didn't say he would," Janetta corrected him gently. "I said he was years and years older than I am, and respectable, and Ollie loved him, and we could trust him absolutely. That's all true, isn't it?"

MacLeod was speechless, and she went on:

"When I said that he was perfectly qualified to look after me and see that I didn't get into mischief—well, he's been doing that for twenty years, and if he isn't qualified after all that practice I don't know who is!"

"Nobody on this earth can do that!" MacLeod asserted with feeling. "I do not know what to say to you——"

"Then let me tell you of a perfectly lovely plan I have that would be the greatest assurance of protection and propriety and all that sort of thing, if you are still worrying for fear I can't take care of myself. I shall go up there as his daughter! Then I won't have to live in lodgings; we can get some sort of a little shack and Peddar can take care of it while I am away at the store. That will explain him, too, and you won't have

to find any work for him to do." She paused and added coaxingly: "Don't you think that would be a splendid arrangement?"

"I don't say that it mightn't be done if you are absolutely set on this mad idea of yours," MacLeod admitted reluctantly. "But what name——"

"His own, of course! He could never remember another at his age. And I shall be a Peddar, too; Jane Peddar! It sounds very quaint, doesn't it?"

"Janey, I never thought you had it in you! It's the original Mother Eve, I expect, that makes wells of duplicity of the youngest of you!" MacLeod shook his head, but the ghost of a smile hovered about his dour mouth, and Janetta knew that she triumphed.

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"Alaska, miss?" Peddar quavered, his eyes fairly bulging from their sockets when she told him. "You and me, and no one to know? I'm sure I don't know what to say to you, miss! We'll both catch our deaths in all that ice and snow, to say nothing of getting bit, may be, by a seal——"

"Nonsense!" Janetta snapped. "We're not going to the Arctics, Peddar! Katalak is warm and pleasant, at this time of year, anyway, and it will be just the thing for your rheumatism. They grow flowers and vegetables and everything up there just as we do, Mr. MacLeod says, and it's a nice little town."

Peddar sighed.

"Man and boy, I've been in the service of the Gilder-sleeves for nearly fifty years, but never have I thought

to see this day! Many a wild prank of yours and Mr. Oliphant's I've covered up, if you'll excuse me for saying so, miss, when you were little and it was my duty, maybe, to tell on you, but to be joining you in one now at my time of life——"

"It's not a wild prank, Peddar. Can't you understand? I'm going there to look after my brother's business for him while he is away."

"I'd follow you to the ends of the earth, miss, and well you know it, if you needed me, but I would feel a lot easier in my mind if it was Mr. Geddes and not Mr. MacLeod that was sending us! If you would just let me speak to him——"

"No. If you would rather stay at home I'll go alone, but I forbid you to say one word to Mr. Geddes," Janetta commanded, adding mendaciously: "You know it must be all right or Mr. MacLeod would not have suggested it, and he would not hear of anyone going with me except you. He said there was no one else whom he would trust, not only to look out for me but to keep our secret; not to tell anyone why we were up there. You see, it is a very confidential matter."

"I'm sure I am obliged to Mr. MacLeod for the confidence he has in me." Peddar straightened with simple dignity. "I'll do my best by you, miss, and I'll open my mouth to no one."

He sighed again and shook his head as he glanced about the dismantled library, and added:

"But I'll ask you kindly to remember that this journey is none of my doing. I'm against it from the start, and I feel in my bones that something will happen."

It was the last night in the old Gildersleeve house.

Mrs. Everton, with an expression of injury not unmixed with indignation, had taken herself off that afternoon, a full month before it suited her own plans to depart; the servants with the exception of Peddar had been dismissed with a month's wages in lieu of notice, and as Janetta, too, glanced about her the house seemed already to have ceased to be home. The rugs rolled back from the bare floors, the furniture swathed in linen and stacked against the wall, the blank spaces where the portraits and mirrors had hung—all gave to the room the forlorn air of a place long untenanted.

Would it ever be home to her again, she wondered vaguely. Would she and Peddar return to it in the autumn and would life go on as before, or would strangers come to live beneath her grandfather's roof while she—the race for the single-track road lost and the mine taken from them—waited in ignominious poverty for Ollie's return, to tell him that she had failed in the task she had assumed?

The foreboding of an utter change in existence was heavy upon her, greater than the project in Alaska, with all its unknown perils, could account for, but she threw it off resolutely. She must not, could not fail! If the young engineer could accomplish his part of the task, surely she could discover what evil machinations were at work to wrest the mine from them, and sound the warning that they might be frustrated.

"If you please, miss, is all your personal luggage to go with you to-morrow to Mrs. Cheever's?" Peddar's voice broke in upon her musing. "Some of it appears to be empty, and I fancied it might have been meant for the storage warehouse with the packing cases."

"No. That square trunk, the steamer trunk, and the old salfskin bag, which are empty, are the only ones I am going to use on our trip, Peddar, and I want you to send them out to-morrow to have the initials painted out, and replaced by 'J. P.' in small, neat letters."

"'J. P.', miss?" Peddar repeated.

"Yes. I'm not traveling as 'Miss Janetta Gildersleeve and—and butler, New York,' you know." She laughed. "I'm 'Jane Peddar' and you're my father and we're from—where are we from, Peddar?"

Peddar raised his hands in horrified expostulation.

"Like criminals running away from the law!" he gasped.

"Not you; it's only I who am changing my name to yours. You don't mind adopting me, do you, Peddar?" Janetta asked demurely.

"Your family would turn in their graves!" declared the old man in trembling tones. "I'm sure I'm honored, miss, by your using my name, but I can't think that even Mr. MacLeod would approve of it! There could be no right reason in the world for a Gildersleeve——"

"No one up there must know who I am; no one must know that a Gildersleeve has any interest whatever in Alaska," Janetta explained patiently. "Now do you see, Peddar?"

"No, miss." He shook his head again dolefully. "I don't see anything but that we're doing a wild and reckless thing, and nothing but mischief and trouble will come of it!"

"We'll start two weeks from to-morrow, remember," Janetta observed, ignoring his dismal tone. "I'll give you a check in the morning to buy some new clothes;

you can't go up there looking like a pallbearer, as you have all these years in that funereal black!"

Peddar glanced down ruefully at the garb of his service.

"I'll need no money, Miss. I've a bit put by, and some decent gray clothes, though not good enough to travel with you——"

Janetta laughed once more.

"Wait till you see me!" she exclaimed. "We are going as poor people, Peddar. You haven't heard the worst yet! I'm going to work in a store!"

"Never, miss! I'll not see it! What can Mr. MacLeod be thinking of! A Gildersleeve——"

He paused aghast, and Janetta cried impatiently:

"For goodness sake, forget the Gildersleeves! From the time we leave New York I am your daughter 'Jane' and you've got to treat me as if I were. Just do exactly what I tell you, Peddar, and remember, not a word to a soul!"

Peddar departed shocked beyond effort to protest further, and Janetta was completing her final survey of the room prior to retiring when an open packing case filled with books met her eye, and idly she turned over the topmost ones. They were part of an encyclopedia which her brother had purchased only a month before his departure and with the first volume in her hands she paused, wrinkling her small nose. Mrs. Everton would be the last person in the world to seek knowledge or diversion from such a source, and yet surely it was a touch of her own particular perfume, and none other, which seemed to float out upon the air from the opened book.

Janetta ruffled the pages, and as she did so she saw a small scrap of paper stuck between the leaves of what seemed to be a map. It was the map of Alaska! With a murmured exclamation, she drew out the slip of paper.

Upon it, in Adele's unmistakable hand was written: "Northern Star." The paper fluttered from the girl's fingers, and she sank into the nearest chair. So Mrs. Everton had known all the time of the true owners of the dummy company! She must have done so; the coincidence was too impossible to be considered. She had never mentioned it, and in a month she was going west with the Winfields!

Dazed from the unexpected revelation Janetta held the book closer to the light and examined the map with minute care. It had not occurred to her before to look up the little town to which her mission was taking her, yet she would have had no difficulty in locating it, for a circle had been drawn with a faint pencil stroke around the little star labeled "Katalak."

Could it have been Ollie himself who had so marked it? Andrew Geddes' remark when she told him of Mrs. Everton's opportunely revived friendship with the niece of the man who was their implacable enemy recurred to her: "I would not put it past her to accept a commission from Winfield to try to find out if there is anything in the wind."

He had said, too, that he would have sent her packing long before if he had known that she was a friend of theirs, and he was no alarmist. Perhaps he should be told now of the evening's discovery.

Even as the thought came to her, however, Janetta

negatived it. She would not take anyone into her confidence. With Adam MacLeod's reluctant backing and Peddar's moral support she would see her self-appointed task through alone.

Persis and William Cheever welcomed her wholeheartedly the next day, but before the week was out her hostess was conscious of a change in the girl, subtle but unmistakable. She was no longer the flippant, frivolous Janey of the past two seasons; there was a glow of serious purpose in her eyes, a new dignity which seemed to forbid an intrusion upon her unwonted reticence.

"The infant has something on her mind," Billy remarked one evening to his wife. "I'm hanged if I don't think there is something queer about the whole business, her closing up the house like this, and shaking that Everton woman and coming to you. Has she told you anything, Sis?"

"Not a word!" Mrs. Cheever exclaimed. "I cannot understand her these days at all. She won't play about with us any more but keeps going off every day on private expeditions of her own and claims that it is business. What in the world has Jane to do with business? Old Mr. Geddes takes care of all their affairs. She used to tell me everything and now I can scarcely get a word out of her. I mean to try to-morrow, though. This mysterious air of hers is getting on my nerves."

Yet when the opportunity came while they were having tea alone together on the following afternoon Mrs. Cheever did not find it easy to approach the subject. Janetta with that new and maddening preoccupation of

hers was staring straight before her and roused only when her hostess leaned forward and laid an impulsive hand upon her arm.

"Janey dear, what is it that is troubling you?"

"Nothing, Persis; what should there be?"

"Well, I didn't know, but you have seemed so changed since you came to us, I was afraid that perhaps I had offended you that day when you told me you wanted to do something really practical to help and I discouraged you."

Janetta laughed lightly.

"You didn't. If you only knew it, you gave me just the right advice." She paused and added: "If I seem rather quiet and absent-minded, please don't mind me. It is because I am trying to plan something out, and there are difficulties in the way."

"Couldn't I help, dear?" Mrs. Cheever asked meekly.

"Perhaps, but the trouble is that I can't tell you the whole truth. You see, it isn't my own secret. If you did help me you would have to act rather in the dark."

"I don't mind that, Janey. You can be trusted not to do anything foolish. Of course, I am simply dying with curiosity, but perhaps you can tell me everything some time. What is it that you want me to do?"

"You are going to open your camp up in Maine on the first of June, aren't you? I wonder if you will mail some letters for me from there."

"'Mail letters for you!'—you mean——" Mrs. Cheever sat very straight in her chair and eyed the girl before her in growing wonder.

"Yes. You are going to be there all summer, aren't you?" At her hostess' nod Janetta continued hurriedly:

"I would like to have sent to you once a month from New York a plain manila envelope with your address typed upon it. Inside you will find a batch of letters from me addressed to Ollie and to Mr. Geddes. There will be a little date written very faintly in pencil on the corner of each. Will you erase that and mail them on the dates named? And for goodness sake, don't get them mixed!"

"You mean, of course, that you want them to think you are with me all summer? But Janey, child, where are you going? What are you going to do? Surely you can tell me that."

Janetta shook her head.

"That is just what I cannot tell you, Persis. Only you may be sure I am not going to do anything very dreadful. It is just something which Mr. Geddes with his old-fashioned ideas would not approve of, and he would be sure to stir up Ollie and make him unhappy over there when there is really no occasion for it. I am of age and have a perfect right to do as I please, you know, but I simply don't want any fuss made about it."

"Janey, I—— Of course, I am willing to do anything I can for you, but I do want to be sure that you are acting wisely." Mrs. Cheever was plainly disturbed. "Couldn't you just give me an inkling of the sort of thing you are contemplating? You know, I shall have to fix Billy, too, for he is bound to come to town and run into Mrs. Geddes, and he will have to pretend that you are in camp with me. Billy isn't very good at pretending."

"I can tell you this much. I have found some real

practical work for myself in spite of, or rather because of, what you said to me that day, in a way. It is something that will really help, Persis, and you will be helping, too, if you will mail those letters for me, and coach Billy."

"But where is this work? Here in New York?"

"No, but you mustn't worry about me. I shall have the very best of chaperones." Janetta sighed and added in a monotonous tone as though she were repeating a lesson: "Someone years and years older than I am, and eminently respectable, someone whom Ollie loves and trusts implicitly. Does that assurance satisfy you, Persis?"

"It will have to, Janey." Mrs Cheever smiled. "I am doing a perfectly mad thing in consenting to this, and if Mr. Geddes ever finds it out I suppose he will all but eat me, but I will do it."

A week later in the bright sunshine of an early May morning Janetta took leave of her friend. At the curb a taxi burdened with two battered trunks and an ancient bag stood chugging impatiently.

As Mrs. Cheever's arms folded about the girl in her strangely shabby suit, she felt her trembling.

"Oh, Janey, can't you tell me what it is all about, dear?" she implored for the last time. "I am so worried and anxious about you! I feel that there is something underneath all this which I should understand. Won't you, at least, write to me?"

"Yes, I will slip a little note for you in one of those manila envelopes now and then. Buck up, Persis, I'll come back with flying colors, you'll see! Good-by."

Yet it was a suddenly miserable Janetta who huddled

in a corner of the taxi and fought back the tears behind her neat, dark blue veil. Through all the time of waiting and planning she had been filled with confidence, but now with the moment actually at hand a feeling of utter dismay swept over her. What possible qualification had she for the task which she had set herself? Dared she face the immediate future?

Then in a swift revulsion of feeling she straightened herself with a little shake. Ollie was doing his share, she would do hers. As to qualifications, well, she could at least "sell goods over a counter."

She carefully smoothed down the blue suit of two seasons ago, wriggling her fingers at the unaccustomed touch of the silk gloves which encased them, and when the station was reached it was Jane Peddar who descended from the taxi and started upon the far trail.

CHAPTER V

KATALAK

“STEAMER in sight yet?” Jud Pittinger came to the door of the company store as a tall, lanky figure paused for a moment in the slanting drizzle of rain outside. “She’s late again, by cracker! Well, I don’t care if she never comes this time!”

“What’s eatin’ you, Jud?” The tall figure looked down on the shorter, rotund one with slowly dawning amusement. “You’re always a-lookin’ for the old boat as if your best girl was comin’ on it.”

Jud’s ruddy countenance flushed a deep crimson.

“I been naterally anxious about my new stock, with you boys whoopin’ around for stuff that’d run out a month before she opened up,” he asserted with dignity. “Wish I had your job now, Harve, in spite o’ that jolt you got the other night. Find out yet who it was you almost caught trying to bore holes in your pile driver?”

“No, but the ——— left his ship’s auger behind him, and it don’t belong to any of our outfit.” Harve Dugdale swore with picturesque fluency as he glanced down at his bandaged hand and arm. “I’d have dropped him, too, orders or no orders, if he hadn’t been close enough to bring that ——— auger down on my wrist!”

“What does the new chief say about it?” the store-keeper asked curiously.

"Not much of anything. He's layin' low, I reckon, till they show their hand a leetle mite more." Harve shrugged. "But what's the matter with your job here that you're so anxious to change? You act like bad news was comin' in on this here steamer."

"Bad news is right!" responded the storekeeper with unwonted bitterness. "I ain't said anything about it until the last minute, because I knew gosh blamed well how you boys would give me the laugh, but my new assistant is gettin' in one her to-day so I might's well let it out. Harve, what do you think the Big Boss has wished on me?"

"Dunno." The superintendent of dock construction shifted his quid impartially from one leathery cheek to the other and gazed out over the swarming horde of workmen at the waterfront to the sparkling blue of the bay beyond.

"It's a girl! A lady assistant!" Unmitigated shame and disgust sounded in the little man's tones.

Harve Dugdale nearly swallowed his quid, but by a mighty gulp retrieved it.

"A what?" he demanded incredulously.

"A female!" Jud Pittinger amplified, for the benefit of his astounded listener. "Hell, ain't it?"

The last observation would have been staggering under other circumstances, for the storekeeper was known throughout the outfit for his religious avoidance of any but the most innocuous of expletives, but it passed unnoticed under the spell of his cataclysmic disclosure.

"A woman!" Harve gasped. "You—you feeling all right this morning, Jud? Ain't been hittin' up the red-eye over at the Full Blast, have you?"

"Wish I had!" Jud retorted recklessly. "What in time I'm going to do with a girl in here on Saturday nights, when all the wops and Chinks and Polacks pile in to get rid of some of their dough before the Full Blast gets it is more than I know! Remember the night they tried to rush me? That would have been a fine time to have a hysterical female hidin' behind the counter, wouldn't it?"

"There's plenty of 'em hanging around the Full Blast and the Happy Days that wouldn't have batted an eye——"

"Not this kind," declared Jud firmly. "She's a lady; leastways that's what the Big Boss says."

"The hell he does!" Harve remarked soberly. What the general superintendent said usually carried weight. "What the——put the notion in his head of gettin' a woman up here for, anyway?"

"Well, he says it's on account of the shortage of men, and you know yourself what a time we've had gettin' an outfit together, but I guess maybe it's a poor relation of somebody higher up. I've got to teach her the business, too!" Jud added indignantly. "Bet I won't know where half of the stock is inside of a week!"

"A lady!" repeated Harve, adding in some alarm: "How old is she, Jud? What'll we do with her? She'll have to go to Ma Heaney's; I can't take a single man off the job to knock up a shack for her."

"She's young, I guess," Jud hazarded gloomily. "Young enough to have a father living, anyway. He's comin' up with her."

"Has the Big Boss got a job lined up for him?" demanded Harve with sudden interest of quite another

sort. "I can use him, if he's out of a wheel-chair! I'm as shorthanded as——"

"Don't know nothin' about that," the storekeeper interrupted sourly. "I got my own troubles! I keep this place neat as I can with the gang tromping in an' out, but what if she's one of these here death-on-dirt females? This ain't any dod-gasted department store!"

"We've got to turn out and give her a reception, anyways," Harve remarked. "Got any open-faced shirts in stock, Jud? We'll have to——"

He broke off as running feet sounded upon the plank sidewalk and both men turned to see a snapper hastening toward them.

"What is it, Bert?"

"Loam in the concrete sand again!" the snapper announced. "Joe Zurak swears it was all right when they knocked off at seven last night, and he's about ready to knife somebody! Ivan Mirko, on the night shift, don't know anything about it. Says it's the third time this week."

"I'll have to see the new chief —— —— ——!" Harve hurried off, his assistant foreman at his heels, and his curses died away in the sudden clatter of the pile-driver.

Jud stood still where they had left him, staring out through the rain upon the familiar scene at the waterfront, where the bustling activity never ceased even for the short two hours of semi-twilight which separated one long day from another during the summer season which was just upon them.

At the end of Main Street where formerly it had meandered down to the bay, the land had been filled in

to meet the new dock for which the last of the piles were being driven, and across the way almost at the water's edge the Northern Star storage yard was stacked high with kegs and boxes, lumber, girders and all the raw material which would go into the building of the single-track road.

In its midst the full swing crane reared its head, the creak of the long boom as it sorted the material with mechanical precision breaking in upon the incessant rattle and clamor of the pile driver.

And everywhere there were men. On the stringpiece near the government breakwater, where the company barges were moored, in the storage yard, swarming over the half-planked dock; Russians and Chinese, Italians and Hungarians; with here and there the leathery, lantern-jawed face of the Yankee. Low above them all through the misty drizzle hung the smoke from the salmon cannery just beyond.

It was a scene for the master hand of a Pennell, but to Jud Pittinger's accustomed eyes it meant merely the dreary monotony of every-day existence, and he gazed once more seaward.

There was still no sign of the belated steamer, and Jud turned and re-entered the store preparatory for the three-o'clock shift, which would bring fresh trade. He was piling pouches of tobacco on the shelf behind him, when a heavy step sounded on the door-sill and a deep, hearty voice hailed him.

"Hello, Jud. Steamer's late again."

Jud turned and greeted the general superintendent with an air of reproachful resignation.

"Yes. I ain't particular 'bout this boat, Mr. Bowers:

we got up the supplies we needed most by the other two that came in since the season opened," he replied.

"Well, you're getting some new brands up with this cargo; class of goods you never saw in a company store before, Jud. Regular white man's cigars, and high-grade candy and razors with honest-to-God steel blades."

Jim Bowers was the biggest man in the Northern Star outfit: standing six feet six, his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest would have been worthy of a Hercules and now as he leaned over the counter and stared down at the astonished little storekeeper, his deep-throated laugh boomed out above the vibrating roar and rattle of the machinery outside.

"What for?" Jud demanded. "The boys are satisfied now, and only the other day a feller sneaked in that I hadn't seen before and tried to get some flannel shirts. I had a hunch that he belonged to the Unatika outfit and I sidetracked him."

The general superintendent's heavy, good-natured face grew serious.

"I guess that's what for, between you and me," he said confidentially. "You hit the nail on the head, Jud. When I got notice from the New York office in the last mail that the goods were coming up, together with the inventory and the fixed prices we were to sell them for, I saw that it was a little below cost, even back home. There was a quiet tip handed me to pass on to you, too, that if any of the other outfit should get wind of the new stock and try to edge in, you were to sell to them, letting on you thought they belonged to our crowd."

"Well, may I be eternally hanged!" Jud ejaculated. "Is that bunch crazy back at the head office? What

in time do they want to sell to that rotten gang for, and below cost at that?"

"Search me!" Jim Bowers shrugged. "Orders are orders, that's all I know. You're to keep this under your hat, you know, Jud, and be kind of sparing with the new lot at first, if you don't want the store stampeded."

"I'll be sparing of it!" Jud promised grimly, adding: "I s'pose the flossy candy is for my new assistant! Say, Mr. Bowers, what did you hang her on me for, anyway? Ain't I got enough on my hands as it is?"

"Don't kick until you see how she turns out," the superintendent advised. "Here's your list of the new stuff that is coming in."

Jud glanced hastily over it and groaned.

"Only a while ago I said to Harve that we weren't runnin' a department store, and now look at this! What do they think this place is, Paris? Neckties! Silk handkerchiefs! Tea! *Tea!*" he repeated bitterly. "I'd like to know who the lunatics are that we're working for, anyway!"

"The Northern Star is all I know." Jim Bowers straightened as the whistle blew. "See you when the 'Queen' comes up the bay."

For the next half-hour Jud was kept busily employed by his patrons, but soon the slouching crowd of weary workmen disappeared to seek their bunks, and the clatter of the pile driver and creak of the long-boomed whirley which had momentarily ceased shattered the stillness once more. Jud set his counters and shelves to rights and then with an eye to the arrival of his new assistant he swept the freshly accumulated mud scrapings carefully

from the door before taking up his post again at the door.

As he did so a young man emerged from the main office of the company, which was situated between the store and the waterfront, and nodded pleasantly to him.

"The 'Queen' is just in sight," he said. "She'll warp in before supper."

Jud shaded his eyes with one leathery hand and descrying a small dark object trailing a plume of smoke behind it far out on the sullen gray waters, he nodded in his turn, but gloomily.

"Reckoned she'd get in to-day, Mr. Hoyt," he assented. "You've heard about my new assistant who's comin' in on her?"

The chief engineer smiled, showing a flash of white teeth in his brown face.

"Yes, you are going to have a saleslady, I hear. I wish I could remedy the deficiencies in my organization as easily, Jud."

"Looka' here, Mr. Hoyt," the storekeeper observed eagerly, "if there's any place in any of your crews that a woman could fill you can take her and welcome. I don't need her no more'n a cat needs two tails. It was just an idee of the general superintendent."

"No, thank you," Barney Hoyt laughed. "I've got enough trouble right now in the outfit without introducing any new elements."

"I heard you had." Jud's face sobered. "Bert said Joe Zurak found loam in the concrete sand this morning that wasn't there last night, and Mr. Hoyt, Zurak's a pretty steady man. Before you come——"

"I know." The chief engineer spoke shortly, and the

boyishness died out of his face, leaving a look of grim tenacity. "We'll get that road built though, Jud—make no mistake about that."

As he turned with a brisk gesture and crossed the street for a word with the boss of the bull gang in the storage yard, the storekeeper watched him with an expression half admiring, half commiserating. The new engineer was there, all right. He had nerve and undaunted courage, and he had sailed in to his job with an assurance of conscious efficiency which many an older, more experienced executive might well have lacked. But he was little more than a boy and the influences at work against him were strong and ruthless.

Jud Pittinger was not by nature a timorous man, but he had seen enough of the machinations of the Unatika outfit since he had been storekeeper for the Northern Star to realize that trouble lay ahead.

Would the boy be equal to the emergency? Brief as had been the time since his arrival to take charge of the outfit, he seemed already to have attained a definite degree of popularity amid the horde of mixed races and nationalities. But would they follow his leadership in a moment of possible stress and violence if it came to a show-down between the two factions at war for that single-track road to the mines?

The trail of smoke upon the horizon grew steadily nearer, the dark object resolved itself into the outlines of the sturdy little "Queen of Alaska," and just as the seven o'clock whistle sounded from the cannery the steamer drew in and anchored as near as she dared to the breakwater. The men from bunkhouse and mess crowded down with one accord to the waterfront, joined

by the employees of the canning factory, and Jud Pittinger locked the door of the company store and followed.

The hatches were open and the crane was already bringing the cargo from the hold to pile it upon the decks of the steamer, but as Jud reached the filled-in ground behind the dock space a horse cage swung out from the side of the "Queen" to the stringpiece and a shout rang out from many brawny throats.

Harve Dugdale clutched his arm.

"Here she comes!" he shouted in Jud's ear. "Here's your new assistant. By ——, it's only a girl!"

Willing hands moored the cage close to the end of the stringpiece and there emerged first an elderly man of dignified appearance and a decided paunch, who stepped gingerly out and looked about him with bewildered, shocked gaze. A little impatient push made him step quickly aside and extend his arm, but the trim, slender figure in blue spurned his aid and with a gay, little gesture for him to follow, tripped down the stringpiece to the shore.

The men drew back, eying her curiously, but from among them one stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"Is this Miss Peddar? Glad to meet you, Miss. I'm Jim Bowers, the general superintendent."

The girl laid her hand in his powerful grip and favored him with a smile which brought a deep, crimson flush to his broad face before she turned and beckoned to the reluctantly approaching elderly man.

"This is my father, Mr. Bowers. He—he's a little upset from the trip. It was rather rough." A little

unmistakable giggle escaped her. "But he will be all right by to-morrow. Will I—will it be necessary for me to start work to-night?"

"No, indeed." Could it be the Big Boss speaking in such dulcet tones? "Take your time and get rested up, Miss. You've come a long way. You can start with the seven o'clock shift to-morrow morning, if you like. Glad to know you, too, Mr. Peddar. You'll like it here first rate. Katalak's small, but it's wide open, and if you'd like a job yourself later on I can fix you up."

Peddar surreptitiously wriggled his fingers as they emerged from that crushing grasp, and regarded the smiling giant before him with eyes of honest horror.

"This is Katalak?" he asked feebly. "This—all of it?"

"You said it," Jim acquiesced with pardonable pride. "You can't see it all from here, but up Main Street there we've got two saloons with as stiff a game going as any north of the line, and a restaurant and general store beside the cannery you see over there. There's nothing slow about us and when the railroad goes through——" He broke off and added: "But you'll want to be getting on up to your lodgings. Sorry there's no shack ready for you, but I've been short-handed ever since Mr. MacLeod's letter came. You'll be all right at Ma Heaney's, though. She'll take right good care of your daughter and make it comfortable for you till you can get quarters of your own."

"You are very kind, Mr. Bowers," the girl spoke with an air of finality, "but you mustn't take any extra trouble on our account. I've come up to work for you just like any other employee of the outfit, and I—we—we'll get

along all right. Where is this Mrs. Heaney's? Is it a boarding house?"

"Lodging house," the superintendent corrected her. "It's just up Main Street; I'll show you. Your baggage will come off in the next trip of the cage."

The men who had crowded about again, drinking in every word, fell back silently and made a path between the storage yard and the shore line as big Jim Bowers turned and led the way.

"Peddar—father!" The girl gave the elderly man's arm a little shake. "Come along and don't look so shocked!"

"Yes, miss, but I'd have a few words to say to Mr. MacLeod if he was here! To send you to a heathen place like this. Oh, miss, we shall never be able——"

"Jane!" the girl whispered fiercely. "How often have I told you not to call me, 'miss?' Play up; you know how much depends on you—father."

A hollow groan was her only answer as Peddar followed her to the planked sidewalk on Main Street, where the mud oozed up between the boards upon his immaculate shoes, and strange, rough-looking characters in nondescript costumes of toil eyed him with what he took be baleful antagonism on every hand.

The Full Blast was living up to its name as they passed. Through the swinging door the rattle of chips and odor of stale liquor drifted out to them, and above the clink of glass and shuffle of feet a raucous voice was already raised in unmelodious and decidedly ribald song.

Peddar's gait quickened until he reached the side of his self-elected daughter and her companion. Neither

had noticed the figure which stood outside the main office of the company across the way and gazed after them with a speculative look in the deep brown eyes.

“Where in thunder have I seen that girl before?” murmured the construction engineer, Barney Hoyt.

CHAPTER VI

THE I. W. W. THING AGAIN

THE huge, square, two-storied, unpainted shack before which their guide paused reminded the girl of a forlorn country orphanage which she had once seen and involuntarily she gave a little shudder, but a dolorous groan from Peddar warned her not to betray her own sinking spirits lest he collapse altogether from the accumulated shock of their journey's end.

With a reassuring pat upon his arm she started up the shallow steps when the door flew open and its space was veritably filled by a wide uncorseted figure which promptly extended two fat arms in greeting.

"Come right in, dearie. This your Pa? We've been expectin' you all day, but the 'Queen's' allus late. I'm mighty glad you got here safe and sound!"

"Jane Peddar" suddenly found herself clasped in a warm and none too clean embrace, from which a short month ago she would have recoiled in amazed resentment, but now a little inaudible sob welled up in her throat, and for an instant her head drooped against the capacious bosom. The coarsened voice held a motherly note which struck a treacherously responsive chord in the girl's lonely, dismayed heart and for the first and last time she was perilously near a breakdown.

The next moment she had set her little teeth reso-

lutely and drew herself with all gentleness from Ma Heaney's welcoming arms.

"Thank you, Mrs. Heaney, I'm glad to be here." A backward glance at Peddar's scandalized face brought a hysterical giggle almost to her lips, but she fought it down. "Come in, father."

"You, too, Jim," Ma Heaney supplemented hospitably. "There's a little something behind the desk that you know you're allus welcome to, and I guess a couple of fingers wouldn't go bad for your Pa, either, Miss Peddar; he looks sort o' done up." She led the way into a dingy office walled with thin unpainted pine boards and furnished with a few uncertain looking chairs, a long counter which evidently served as a desk and a huge stove from which a roaring fire sent out cheering waves of heat.

"Take a drink if she offers it, Peddar; you've *got* to!" Jane whispered in a peremptory aside and crossing to the stove warmed herself while she watched the ceremonial with amused eyes.

Ma Heaney produced a bottle and two glasses from beneath the counter, poured a copious drink into each and offered one to the miserable Peddar. Big Jim Bowers lifted the other.

"Here goes!" he said, including the girl in a sweeping wave of his arm. "Hope you'll like it here with us in Katalak."

She nodded, smilingly, while Ma Heaney beamed and Peddar, concealing a grimace, heroically drank the contents of his glass in one desperate gulp. Instantly a rich purple hue mounted to his brow and as a strangled

gasp emanated from his outraged throat their hostess turned to Jane.

"Come on up and I'll show you the room I got fixed for you," she invited. "It ain't much, but it's clean, if I do say it. Your Pa'll have to bunk in with the boys to-night, but he looks plumb wore out, and I guess he won't care so long as he gets some sleep. I've warned 'em not to start no rough-house with him."

The room to which Ma Heaney conducted the girl was a narrow cell-like space thinly partitioned off from the others in the long row after the manner of a dormitory. Jane looked about at the iron cot, rickety washstand and single chair which the room contained and her fastidious soul rose in anguished protest. How could she ever endure it? The whole episode of their arrival seemed to her like some horrible nightmare from which she must soon awaken to find herself back amid her own familiar, luxurious surroundings once more. But Ma Heaney's hoarse, good-natured voice brought her back swiftly to the grim reality.

"You ain't never been 'round a mining town before, have you?"

Jane shook her head.

"Well, if you hear a kind of a racket up here 'round about eleven when the last shift goes off and the first goes on of the Northern Star outfit that you're goin' to work for, don't get scairt or nothin'. I got a few of the foremen lodgin' here with me, and they're bound to skylark a little though I warned 'em. There ain't a mite of harm in 'em and they'll treat you right." Ma Heaney broke off and added: "You don't look like the kind of a girl that would pick out Katalak to work

in when there's so many stores back home, but they tell me there's no limit to what our seck is doing in place of the men-folks now that they're all gone off to war."

Jane braced herself warily. This was the first note of suspicion.

"Well, you see my father has been dreaming of getting up into this country ever since the first Klondike rush, and the Northern Star people offered me such good wages that we thought we would come and he could look over the ground a little." Jane lied glibly. "Then when my brother comes back from the war, maybe we could stake out a claim somewhere."

"Good land! Your Pa got that notion too, at his time o' life?" Ma Heaney sighed. "If you knowed how many of 'em I'd seen come and go—I've grubstaked more'n one of 'em, too, when I was a newcomer—you'd get that idee out of his head! This part o' the country is staked out already like a buryin' ground; and a buryin' ground it's been for most o' the poor suckers."

"Yet a new copper mine was discovered up here only recently right near the Northern Star, wasn't it?" Jane glanced covertly at her landlady as she spoke. "The 'Una'-something it is called, isn't it?"

Ma Heaney thrust back a wisp of hair in which gray battled with the glint of peroxide, and a certain grimness made itself manifest about her generous mouth.

"Unatika," she supplied the name shortly. "Can't tell how good it'll be yet, the ground ain't hardly scratched. I'll go show your Pa where to wash up, and when you're ready the eatin' house is right across the street."

Left alone, Jane approached the bed and turned it

down with two shrinking fingers to inspect the thin red blankets and coarse gray-looking sheets, then shudderingly perched herself on the edge of the chair. Never, never had she supposed that it would be as dreadful as this! The impressions of the last hour had been so vividly, deeply stamped upon her consciousness that they had quite obliterated her vague preconception of what had lain before her.

She had taken it for granted that there would be many workmen about; workmen in neat overalls, brisk and smiling and respectful. The sea of faces which had pressed about her at the landing stage, Latin, Slavic and Mongolian, but alike unshaven and lowering, had struck the first dismay to her heart, and now this bare, hideous place, and the common creature who presided over it filled her with unutterable disgust and loathing. Could she bring herself to live the life of these awful people for the weeks and months which lay ahead?

But it was for Ollie! It was to do his work that she had come! The thought made her straighten in her chair, and her small chin thrust itself out dominantly. What did dirt and squalor and loneliness and a horde of savages matter when it meant taking up the task which he had relinquished for a greater, higher one? She could not fail now; she had come far to keep watch and ward over what was Ollie's and her own, and she would not turn back like a coward at the first glimpse of the field of her future work.

The thought of her brother reminded her that she must hasten to apprise Peddar of the new addition to his recently acquired family, and afterwards rearranging her hair she descended to the office. The superin-

tendent had vanished, but Peddar, still lightly flushed from the effects of his unusual libation, awaited her in a stoical silence.

"Come along, father, we had better go and have dinner,—er, supper," Jane announced cheerfully. "The restaurant is just across the street, Mrs. Heaney says."

As he allowed himself to be drawn toward the door Peddar vouchsafed with the calmness born of desperation:

"I've never gone against you, miss, but if your grandfather was to see you now he would turn in his grave!"

"Oh, bother my grandfather!" Jane snapped. "You've had all my ancestors turning in their graves ever since we left New York! They must be a restless lot!"

"Miss Janey——" Peddar halted, shocked at the sacrilege, but she dragged him remorselessly on. "When I saw that impossible person put her arms about you, I made up my mind to one thing. I shall write to Mr. Geddes to-morrow. I know my dooty, miss——"

"You'll do no such thing!" retorted his self-styled daughter. "You're not thinking of me at all, Peddar, or of Ollie's interests that are at stake; you're just thinking of your own comfort! You want to go back to New York, and you don't care what happens——"

"Miss Janey—Jane, I mean——" His tone was filled with honest reproach. "I'm thinking of what's due to a Gil——"

"If you are, you will stay right here and write nothing to anyone," Jane interrupted firmly. "By the way, Ollie's your son, too; I had to invent a brother who was going to come up here and stake out a claim after

the war, to account to Mrs. Heaney for our presence here now."

Peddar's only answer was a faint groan, as they entered the Elite Restaurant and seated themselves at one end of a long linoleum-covered table.

Jane looked about her with frank interest. The place was sparsely filled at that hour, but scattered about at the other tables she found many types wholly new and strange to her. Near the door two heavily bearded men, with the rain dripping from their rubber coats and turned-back hat brims, lounged over the remains of their meal, smoking villainous pipes and staring at her with a wondering, compelling gaze.

She moved her eyes hastily to encounter the curious, half-resentful glances of a girl seated alone at the next table; a girl dressed in tawdry, cheap finery, who shrugged her thin shoulders beneath the sleazy silk gown in a gesture of utter weariness as she turned sullenly away. There was an indefinable sense of pitiful youth about her yet her eyes were as old as the world. Jane wondered if this could be one of the dance-hall denizens of whom she had spoken so airily to Adam MacLeod; if it were, then the movies had revealed but a travesty of the truth.

Through a swinging door she could see two impassive-faced Chinamen moving with incredible swiftness from stove to pantry shelves and a solitary waiter in a grimy apron limped about the table at the rear, where a group of brawny young men were eating with audible gusto. Their collarless shirts rolled up at the elbows and turned in at the throat revealed powerful brown arms and thick necks upon which the muscles stood out like cords. Jane

wondered if they could be her workmen, hers and Ollie's, and with the thought she felt a queer, democratic impulse of friendliness steal over her. They looked so young and strong; as if they could be good workers and good fighters, too, if the need arose.

The waiter came to them and she ordered a simple meal from the choice he submitted to her in a nasal monotone, then turned to her companion.

"Isn't this fun, father?"

"Fun!" repeated Peddar sepulchrally. "It's a disgrace for you to be in such a place! I don't know what's come over you, miss—Jane. I don't, indeed! You aren't the same young lady as you were; your brother would never know you in the world! To see you eating with steel forks, from china that wouldn't be allowed in your grandfather's kitchen and food that's enough to poison you——"

"Nonsense!" returned Jane briskly. "This salmon is good, and as long as we don't know *what* the potatoes are fried in——"

She paused as a newcomer entered and after a cool survey of the room advanced deliberately to their table and pulled out a chair. He was tall and dark, with pale, glinting eyes and the bluish tinge about his heavy jaw showed that he was freshly shaven. He favored Jane with an insolently appraising stare and as the blood rushed indignantly to her cheeks she became aware that the mingled clatter of voices and knives at the rear table had ceased.

"Evenin', ol' timer." The man nodded casually to Peddar, who bowed frigidly in response. "Good trip on the 'Queen?'"

Peddar cleared his throat.

"Very fair."

"You and the lady aimin' to stay here in Katalak or hit the trail for the north?" The stranger leered at Jane. "Not much around here to amuse a lady——"

Peddar rose to the occasion and his feet with unexpected aplomb.

"My daughter has come here to work, sir." He beckoned to the waiter. "Come, Jane."

"Peddar, you old dear!" Jane squeezed his arm affectionately as they emerged once more into the strange eerie daylight. "You sat on him beautifully! What a dreadful man!"

"It's only to be expected," Peddar responded mournfully. "If we've got to stay in this wretched hole, miss, you are not to go outside the door without me. One step and I shall write to Mr. Geddes, I shall, indeed!"

"Don't you worry about me; I can take care of myself," she asserted, but her tone was a shade less confident than before.

The insolent stare of the man with the curiously light eyes had shaken her more than she would have admitted and long after she had carefully peeled the covering from her bed and lain herself upon it beneath her steamer rugs his leering face rose before her.

The task which she had assumed grew more and more stupendous, more and more unlikely of achievement. How could she, a mere girl, hope to discover and frustrate the power behind the men who were working to delay the road and finally wrest it and the Northern Star with it from Ollie and herself?

This was a strange country, the people alien and horrible! Even Ma Heaney, who meant to be kind, and that bluff, hearty superintendent were impossible, as Peddar had said. She had never come into contact in all her sheltered existence with individuals of such a class; she did not know how to touch them, reach them; there was no common ground upon which they could meet and she shrank from the thought of such a meeting.

The daylight which still flooded her room made sleep impossible to her unaccustomed eyes and she waited in terror for the eleven o'clock whistle which would mean the change of shift. The partitions were so thin that she could hear above the subdued but never ceasing clatter of the pile-driver a chorus of snores in innumerable keys all about her. Ma Heaney had told her of the "racket" that would ensue, but was that all she had to fear? Suppose some blundering giant, drunk perhaps, should come crashing through her flimsy door? Where was Peddar?

With the first screech of the whistle she started up in bed and then fell back, burying her face and head in the thin pillow, but no pandemonium such as her apprehensive fancy painted came to her. There was a stir of movement and sound down the length of the hall; boots scraping cautiously upon the floor, noisy yawns as quickly suppressed, hoarse grumbling monotonous that were meant to be whispers and at last a tread of heavy feet tiptoeing clumsily down the stairs. Ma Heaney had warned them, she said: could it be that they were keeping quiet because of her nearness?

Even as the thought came someone stumbled, and a rumbling voice reached her ears.

"Can that, you! Remember the lady!"

And they were the foremen of the Northern Star, *her* foremen! Again that warm, comforting glow stole up in her heart. Why, they were friends already! Surely her task would not be impossible with such men to back her up.

She did not realize the change which circumstances had wrought, the miracle which was taking place within her. The Janetta Gildersleeve of a month before would have taken it for granted that all things must be subjugated to her will, all people subservient to her comfort, but Jane Peddar was grateful for the rough chivalry of road-builders, nor did thought of caste disturb the slumber into which she fell even before the weary feet of the men of the last shifted plodded up the stairs.

With the morning, although the dreary drizzle of rain still fell uninterruptedly, Jane felt a reaction from the despondency of the night before in a sweeping tide of renewed courage, and she descended the stairs in high spirits to find Peddar waiting doggedly below.

"Good-morning, father." She patted his head roguishly and he submitted to the mutual indignity with the meekness of resignation. "Did you have a nice sleep?"

"Not a wink," he assured her gloomily. "What with no night-time at all and the men all crowding in—but were you quite all right, miss—Jane?"

"Absolutely, and I think you are an old fraud! You look as if you had slept for a month! Nevertheless, I think you had better look about to-day for a little shack

where we can keep house. If you don't know how to cook I can learn, and I don't like that restaurant."

"I'll have some sort of a place by nightfall—I mean the time that would be nightfall in a Christian country—if I have to turn out the people that are in it!" Peddar promised darkly. "That restaurant is no place and neither is this tramps' lodging house! If they only knew who you were, miss——"

They were crossing the street and no one was in earshot, but Jane pressed his arm warningly.

"You must be careful and try to remember not to call me that," she said. "And Ma Heaney's is no tramps' lodging house; those men are as self-respecting as you or I, and of quite as much use in the world. I'm beginning to see a lot of things that I've been blind to before."

Peddar gasped at such rank heresy to the caste at whose shrine he had worshiped all his conventional life, but he made no direct comment. Instead he coughed deprecatingly and remarked:

"I've not seen the young man that's in charge of it all up here, yet; the new engineer you were mentioning to me, m—Jane."

"Why, that's so! I hadn't thought about him, everything has been so new and strange." Jane paused, then added with a little laugh. "We'll see him later, but we're not important enough to meet him right away, you know; we are only—at least I am—among the minor workers, and quite beneath his notice."

Yet when they emerged from the eating-house after a hasty breakfast amid a noisy crowd of laborers and returning miners from up country hurrying to catch

the "Queen," they found Jim Bowers waiting before the door and he was not alone. A tall, young man, slight in comparison with the superintendent's massive frame, but with a lithe springiness about his easy poise which bespoke the athlete, stood talking earnestly with him.

"Good-morning, miss." Jim Bowers swept off his drenched rubber hat. "This is Mr. Hoyt, the construction engineer and boss of the whole Northern Star works."

Jane placed her hand in the outstretched one and glanced up with a smile to meet a pair of quizzical brown eyes bent upon hers. One startled flash of memory and the smile froze upon her lips.

There was no mistaking those brown eyes nor the carriage of the head with its slightly curling chestnut hair and clean-cut features.

It was the insufferably rude young man of that chance encounter which might have been so tragic on that Westchester road at midnight weeks before! The I. W. W. Thing again!

CHAPTER VII

AN ENEMY AND A FRIEND

JUD PITTINGER took one look at the vision in the rubberized mackinaw with the red-gold hair shimmering from beneath her waterproof hat and dodged precipitately behind the counter as big Jim Bowers led her forward.

"Mr. Pittinger," the superintendent began with due ceremony, "this is your new assistant, Miss Peddar. I told her you would take charge of her and show her the ropes."

"Howdy, Miss." Jud drew a deep breath as he carefully wiped his hand on his trousers before extending it to meet the little one held out to him. "Glad you g-got here; I've been terrible shorthanded."

"Where shall I put my hat and coat? On that peg up there?" Jane asked in a business-like way, nodding toward a row behind the counter. "Now I am ready to start right in."

"Gosh!" Jud was still staring at her as if hypnotized and his tone was filled with wondering admiration. Here was a female that didn't make no fuss but got down to brass tacks just like a man. She was a lady, too, a regular lady, if he was any judge. What in tarnation was she doing up here in a mining company's store?

The deep-throated voice of Jim Bowers awoke him from his reverie.

"Well, I got to get on down to the docks. That new stock of yours that I told you about yesterday is all unloaded and as soon as it's sorted out from the rest I'll send it on up. So long, Miss Peddar; if there's anything I can do for you just you let me know."

She smiled her thanks and then turned to the store-keeper.

"How shall I begin?" she asked simply.

"Oh, I guess I better show you where things is and give you the list of prices." Jud added in a careful tone: "Ain't you ever worked in a store before?"

Jane started to shake her head and then a sudden memory made her dimple.

"I—I've sold things over a counter," she admitted.

"What sort of things?" Jud blinked at the glimpse of that dimple but pressed home his question.

"All kinds; but it wasn't at all like this. I'm afraid you will find me very stupid at first, Mr. Pittinger, but if you'll just have patience with me I'll learn, I know."

"Say!" observed Mr. Pittinger in utmost sincerity, "you could be stupid, Miss, and it wouldn't make a mite o' difference!"

Realizing that cryptic as his speech was he had paid a bald compliment to this amazing young woman Jud colored to the roots of his hair and covered his embarrassment by plunging into business at hand.

Jane listened to his directions, following him docilely about the store and apparently examining the stock with the greatest interest, but in reality her thoughts were still busied with that encounter of a half-hour before. That Barney Hoyt, the young engineer on whom Andrew

Geddes had staked everything, should prove to have been the same man upon whom she had, in a moment of resentment, bestowed the most opprobrious epithet which came to her mind, was a coincidence which in her wildest dreams she could not have imagined. Her cheeks burned at the memory of it, and it seemed to her that she could hear again the good-humored unruffled tones in which he had assured her that he was just a workingman.

Had he recognized her? Nothing in his manner, or smile, or the simple words with which he had greeted her showed that he had, yet she felt that in any event his bearing under the circumstances would have been the same. She must find out. She must know!

"That's about all," Jud's voice broke in upon her meditations. "Only we've got to make room some'eres here for a lot of fool stuff that the Big Boss is sending in; neckties and silk handkerchiefs and good cigars and such. Never heard nothing to beat it in my life."

Jane suppressed a smile.

"Why, don't the men want some finery and a better grade of tobacco and things now and then?" she asked.

"'Tain't what they want, it's what they can get up here," Jud responded. "There's never been any kick from them unless the stock ran out. You don't know anything about prices, do you?"

"Not on—on men's things." Jane was busied with a box of cheap razors and she did not look up. "They make good money, don't they? They could afford to pay for almost anything they wanted?"

"They can afford to pay the prices we're asking, that's

sure." Jud broke off and grumbling half inaudibly he moved to the back of the store.

Jane wondered how much of her little scheme had been guessed by the rotund, easy-going shopkeeper. Evidently it did not meet with his approval, whether he divined its real purpose or not. She had seen the letter which Adam MacLeod had written to the superintendent, merely issuing the new orders without explanation in the name of the company, but the genial clear-sighted Jim Bowers was by no means a fool, and she suspected that Jud Pittinger himself was more astute than appeared on the surface. She must pretend ignorance, of course, but meanwhile, she could feel her way.

"Mr. Pittinger, this store is only run for the men employed by the company, isn't it? Do you sell to the miners passing through and the townspeople, also?"

"Not if I know it." Jud wheeled a heavy barrel across the floor and deposited it with a resounding thump. "I have hard enough work keeping enough in stock for our own boys, the way the steamers are runnin' now."

"But there are so many of them!" Jane expostulated. "When you're away, how am I going to tell if a man comes in for something whether he belongs to the Northern Star outfit or not? Have they cards or anything?"

"They have, but I've got so that I know them all." Mr. Pittinger seemed to remember something, and continued hurriedly: "Don't you worry your head about that, Miss. It's a long time since any outsider tried to put it over on me. If anybody comes in, they've got a right to buy here."

Mr. Pittinger had evidently received his instructions, and meant to obey them despite his personal disapproval.

Would the scheme work? Would it serve to win the confidence of any of the rival outfit and wean them from their allegiance to the Unatika Company?

Unaccountably her thoughts drifted back to the man who had tried to engage Peddar in conversation at the restaurant the night before, and on an impulse she turned again to her superior.

"Mr. Pittinger, you say that you know all the men in the Northern Star outfit?"

"By sight, anyway." His voice came to her muffled from behind a huge crate.

"Is there one among them very tall and dark with bluish looking bristles on his chin, and queer, light eyes? He speaks like an American—a Westerner, and he has a way of staring——"

Jud's face popped up suddenly from behind the crate and his sleepy eyes flashed.

"I know him all right, but he don't belong to our outfit. He's Hugh Malison, general superintendent for the Unatika people, and if I was you, Miss, I—ahem—I wouldn't hold no truck with him. He ain't just fit for a lady to speak to. Excuse me for not minding my own business——"

"But I want you to advise me, Mr. Pittinger." Jane smiled upon him. "You see, we don't know anything about anybody up here, my father and I. He tried to talk to us in the restaurant last night, but I—somehow I didn't like him."

"They're no good, any of them; that Unatika crowd." Jud waved a pudgy hand expansively. "There's bad blood between them and us, Miss, as you would be finding out soon enough."

"Oh!" Jane caught her breath effectively.

"I don't want to scare you none, Miss, but—you see that gat under the counter?"

Jane looked where the fat finger pointed and shrank back.

"A pistol!"

"Reg'lar gun." Jud spoke with evident pride. "I'm heeled; that's only for emergencies. Now, if I shouldn't be here and anybody comes in and tries to start something with you, just you reach under and bring that up level with the counter as if you mean business, and you'll see 'em fade away. Ain't afraid of it, are you?"

"N—no." As if to reassure herself Jane took up the ugly looking weapon gingerly and Jud promptly effaced himself behind the crate.

"It's all right, you needn't bother about it now," he assured her hurriedly. "You'll never have to fire it, anyway. Just let 'em think you're going to blow 'em to—to kingdom come. Did you put it back?"

Jane replaced the revolver and the storekeeper rose.

"'Tain't safe to get foolin' 'round with it; it might go off," he warned. "Here comes the new stock now."

In single file a row of Chinese coolies were crossing Main Street, each bent almost double beneath a heavily weighted crate or box or barrel.

Jane viewed them with satisfaction. Here was the concrete result of the long mornings during her stay with Persis Cheever when she had ventured alone into strange, foreign quarters of the city which she had not known existed before. There she had found the peculiar scented hair oil dear to all masculine Italian hearts; tins of salty Russian food; lichee nuts and

bamboo shoots for the Chinese, and the weird-looking instruments which alone can bring out the true spirit of the Czardas.

Jud Pittinger had decried the better grade of American goods; what would he think of these importations? When the coolies had departed Jane watched him going from crate to box, from box to barrel with bewilderment written large upon his countenance and waited for his comment, but none came.

Instead he knocked the top off a crate of cigars, placed a box or two prominently on the counter and then struggled into his rubber coat.

"I got to go see the Big Boss a minute," he announced. "The price of them cigars is a nickel apiece, six for two bits, and no more'n six to a man. One or two of the boys from the night shift may come ramblin' in for a smoke but there 'll be no rush until the three o'clock whistle. Think you can keep store for awhile?"

"Yes,—sir." Jane added the last word as an afterthought, and Jud reddened. "I have the price list here if they want anything else, and I can find whatever it is."

When he departed into the warm rain Jane emerged from behind the counter and made a round of inspection on her own account, bringing up at the cases of new stock at the rear. Mr. MacLeod had executed her order faithfully; every item that she had chosen was before her and she longed not to sell but to give of this bounty to the men who had come so far from civilization to work for what seemed to her to be so pitifully small

a wage that she and her brother might retain possession of the Northern Star.

That they might have resented such charity did not enter her head. Sympathy had been born within her but not understanding, and her mental attitude was still that of Janetta Gildersleeve. The rôle that she was playing pleased her by its sheer novelty despite the loneliness which tugged at her heart, but it was only a rôle; she was not yet awakened to the forces allied here against all her former theories of life, blissfully unconscious of the fire through which she must pass before she could enter wholly into the spirit about her.

As she turned back to the counter she saw a man striding rapidly along the plank walk pause, then suddenly wheel and enter. He was huddled in his coat with up-turned collar and down-drawn hat, and not until he swept off the latter in a slightly ironic bow did she see his face. He was the man of the restaurant, Hugh Malison, the superintendent of the Unatika!

"Good-morning, Miss." He spoke civilly enough, and Jane fancied there was a subtle change from the night before, not only in his manner but in his mode of speech. "So this is what your father meant when he said you had come here to work!"

"My father?" Jane asked the question with her eyebrows.

"In the Elite last night; you haven't forgotten," he replied with easy confidence, resting one elbow on the counter so that his pale, oddly bright eyes were on a level with her own. "I've been scouting around for you all the morning but I didn't think I would find you here."

"Why not?" Jane tossed her head and drew slightly away from him.

"Well, it's pretty far for a little girl to come just to tend store." There was an underlying significance in his laugh which repelled her still more. "You're something of an innovation, you know."

"There have to be pioneers everywhere." She tried to speak lightly, but the words seemed to stick in her throat. "Did you want to buy anything?"

"Perhaps." He glanced down the counter and a box of the freshly opened cigars met his eye. "Hello, Reina Dolores, eh? Say, we're getting some class up here."

"Nickel apiece, six for two bits," Jane announced promptly, wondering at the same time what mysterious coin the latter might be.

Malison whistled.

"That's what old Pittinger told you, is it?" His shoulders shook with amusement. "I'll take a dollar's worth."

"No you won't; only six at a time," she retorted. "Are you one of the Northern Star outfit? I'm not supposed to sell to anyone else."

A swift keen glance shot from the man's pale eyes, but her face was blandly inquiring, and he shrugged.

"Sure. I'm one of the outfit that is going to put the single-track road through."

If the girl sensed the ambiguity of his answer she gave no sign but calmly took possession of the quarter he spun upon the counter.

"Only six!" she cautioned as he helped himself from the box. Then upon a swift impulse she leaned slightly

toward him. "How long do you think the job will last up here—the road building, I mean?"

Again that searching glance swept her face.

"Ask the Chief; he can tell you better than I can. You mean to stay till it's done?"

"That depends." Jane drew a deep breath and plunged: "I hear there have been so many accidents, and nobody seems to understand. It is almost as if there were a jinx on the work, isn't it?"

"Maybe there is!" Malison leered and then leaned suddenly over the counter bringing his face close to hers. "Say, little lady, don't something else go with these cigars?"

"Coupons?" Jane parried, retreating a step or two until unseen her hand could reach to the narrow shelf below.

"No. A kiss!" The man spoke in a low coarse tone and he followed her swiftly with the counter between. "Come now, will you give it to me or shall I take it?"

Jane regarded him critically although she could feel her whole body trembling with the indignation and fear which consumed her.

"I wouldn't if I were you," she said coolly. "You see I have a—a 'gat' I think they call it, right here in my hand, and as I'm not very well acquainted with fire-arms it might go off. I should hate to think of another accident happening to any of the Northern Star outfit."

For a moment she thought that the man would seize her, but she held him steadily with her eyes and something in them must have warned him that she was in earnest. The quick menace which had leaped into his

face burned itself out slowly, and he drew back with a sneering laugh.

"Wild West stuff, eh?" he drawled. "Don't get yourself all excited, little lady, I can wait. But I'll have that kiss yet!"

And he yanked up his coat collar and jerked down the brim of the rubber hat, it seemed to Jane's horror that the silent laughter which shook him must be echoing through the store. He turned without another word and slouched out of the door almost colliding with the bandaged arm of a tall lanky individual who edged in with unaccustomed shyness, his leathery face dyed a rich mahogany. He glanced absently after the man who had just left and then his eyes returned to the girl as if fascinated.

Jane was still flushed with ire at the late encounter, but at sight of the newcomer's obvious embarrassment she managed an encouraging smile.

"Good-morning," she said. "D—did you want to buy something? I'm the new assistant storekeeper."

The new arrival gulped.

"No'm—Yes'm." He corrected himself and swore softly beneath his breath. That smile had been his undoing. "Pretty day, ain't it?"

"Pretty wet one!" Jane laughed. "What do you call bad weather up here in Katalak?"

"October till April." Harve found his voice with the familiar topic. "Nothin' but snow and da—dampness, all the time. You'll see some sunshine if you stay long enough, ma'am."

He had pulled off his hat and stood turning it while

the rain dripped from it between his fingers and the conversation lagged.

"I—I expect to stay until the road goes through," Jane observed at last. "Are you one of the——"

She paused and her prospective customer announced hastily:

"I'm Harve Dugdale, superintendent of dock construction, ma'am." Then his eyes lighted upon the opened box of cigars and slowly bulged.

Jane's glance followed his.

"This is some of the new stock Mr. Pittinger just got in; it came on the same steamer with my father and me." She pushed the box toward him. "Try one, Mr. Dugdale—five cents."

Being wholly unable to express his amazement in language fit for this new storekeeper's ears, Harve mutely took one of the cigars, smelled it half incredulously, then shaking his head replaced it.

"No, ma'am. I—I don't like to counterdict a lady, but I'd be cheatin' you."

"Oh, I know that's a little below what they sell for at home, but I'm sure of my orders." Jane dimpled. "Maybe the Northern Star people want to—to take off some of the price for the men who are putting through the road for them."

Harve stared.

"I reckon you don't know much about mining companies, ma'am," he remarked. "Has Jud got any more new stock in?"

Not untruthfully had Persis Cheever said, on that day which seemed a thousand years ago, that Janey could sell anything to anybody. When Harve Dugdale turned

at last reluctantly to the door his pockets were emptied of everything save his penknife, his gat and a lonely fragment of plug, but his arms were piled high with strange and gaudy garments, boxes of candy and dried fruit, highly scented soap and an astonishing new razor in a leather case.

One resolve had emerged from the chaos of his mind: if Jud had slyly laid in all this — — regalia in anticipation of the lady's appearance on the scene, then he, Harve, meant to be the first and best dressed man in Katalak.

At the door, while he was struggling to replace his hat with his lame arm, Jane overtook him and momentarily relieved him of his burdens.

"How did you get hurt?" she asked shyly.

"Just a little accident, ma'am." Harve reddened.

"One of the kind I've been hearing about—on the steamer coming up here, I mean?" Jane added hurriedly. "People were talking about some funny accidents that have been happening ever since the road was started."

"Yes'm." Harve paused and then said with a touch of sudden roughness in his tone. "Excuse me, but there ain't anybody up here like you, and your father is kind of an old man. If—if anybody says anything to you or—or just *looks*, you let me know. I'm pretty generally on the job."

"Thank you!" There was a little catch in Jane's voice, and as he departed she watched his lanky figure disappear in the rain with a new warmth about her heart. She had made a possible enemy of the man with the

queer, light eyes, but she felt that at least she had made one friend in this hulking, kindly fellow and the first tentative move in the task she had set for herself was accomplished.

CHAPTER VIII

JANE ROLLS UP HER SLEEVES

THERE ain't a mite of use talkin' to me, dearie," Ma Heaney observed as she seated herself heavily on Jane's groaning bed. "I knew from the minute I laid eyes on you that you wasn't fit for this kind of life, and woman to woman, I think your pa was an old fool to bring you up here."

"But Mrs. Heaney, I like the store, and Mr. Pittinger is so nice!" Jane protested, looking up from the bag which she was unpacking before the other's frankly curious gaze.

Ma Heaney shook her head.

"They ain't all like Jud," she responded. "The Unatika outfit's the worst but the Northern Star ain't exactly a celestial choir, and as for the miners and hands from the cannery—— I come from a big city myself—Chicago—and I've traveled some since, but this town'll have 'em all backed off the map for trouble when the real ruction starts."

"What—er, reduction?" asked Jane.

"When them two outfits comes to grips," the other explained. "I was thinkin' some of sellin' out myself and mushin' down to Seattle, but I ain't never been run out of any town yet, and I don't propose to vamoose now just because there's liable to be a battle. It's no place for a little soft thing like you, though. Now, if

you was to go down to Tacoma, and get in a nice, pretty millinery store, or open an ice cream parlor——”

Jane laughed.

“I’m not going to run away, either!” she declared. “But do you really think it will come to an open fight, Mrs. Heaney?”

“It’s fixin’,” predicted her landlady. “There’s been no gunplay yet but when the work starts on the road next week the Unatika people’ll likely come out in the open. My!” she broke off to exclaim, “those are sure pretty things! But what in time you brought ’em up here to *work* in for——”

Jane looked in some dismay at the plain but fine lingeries which billowed out of the bag.

“It’s all very simple,” she protested.

“So are them toilet things, but not for Katalak,” retorted Ma Heaney. “Them dresses, too, that I took out of your trunk this morning to keep from gettin’ rumpled—if I was you, and you’re lookin’ to make some real money, I’d sell ’em to the girls. You’ll get three times what you paid for ’em——”

“What girls?” interrupted Jane.

Ma Heaney’s voluminous bulk twisted somewhat uncomfortably and her face reddened.

“Well, them that do what you’d call kind of a vaudeville act at the dance halls. I could sell ’em for you. There’s Etta and May and Pearl——”

“Is one of them young and thin and tired-looking, with rather pretty eyes?” queried Jane suddenly. “I saw her at the restaurant last night.”

Ma Heaney nodded.

“That’s Etta Carney. She’s stuck on Hugh Malison

and he used to meet her in there reg'lar, but he's kinder givin' her the cold shoulder now. He's got the same job with the Unatika outfit that big Jim Bowers has with the Northern Star and I suspicion that he knows somethin', one way or another, about them 'accidents' that have been happenin'. But here I sit gossipin' when I got a hull floor to clean!" She rose and waddled reluctantly to the door. "You let me know, dearie, if you decide to sell any of your things and I'll fix it for you."

Left alone, Jane sat still on the floor in the midst of her belongings, thinking over what she had learned. So that frail, weary-eyed girl was in love with Malison—Malison, that beast who had insulted her in the store that morning. Jane shuddered anew at the memory of the encounter.

And he was the general superintendent of the Unatika, the man who, in Ma Heaney's estimation at least, knew something of the "accidents" which had delayed the building of the road! Jane shrewdly suspected from the very way in which the buxom landlady had checked herself in the flood tide of her garrulity that she knew far more herself than she was willing to gossip about of the machinations of the rival company, yet why she, a townswoman and unconnected with either outfit, should take sides with the Northern Star remained to be discovered.

Of her sincerity the girl had no doubt; honesty shone from her broad, good-natured countenance. But how far she might be depended upon in a crisis, or to keep a confidence—— Jane shook her head. She must trust no one.

Ma Heaney's sharp eyes had already discerned in spite

of her dissimulation that she was not quite the type of girl she pretended to be, and her curiosity if not her suspicion was aroused. Jane was none too confident that Peddar would not unconsciously betray them both if he were artfully cross-examined, and she determined to keep him as much under her eye as possible until they had established themselves in a domicile of their own.

She heard his voice in the office as she descended the stairs, and the tones in which the response came made her pause. Surely that must be the engineer, Barney Hoyt. Had he recognized her? Was he trying to pump old Peddar? She stole softly down.

"No, sir." Peddar's tone had slipped dangerously back into the subservient inflection of lifelong habit. "We are not from New York, sir. I believe a Mr. MacLeod engaged my daughter to come up here. She can tell you about that. Did you say up three streets and to the right past the—er, Happy Days café, sir?"

"Yes, but don't let any of the boys hear you mention a 'café' in Katalak, or you'll be mobbed." That laughing voice was unmistakably Barney Hoyt's, and Jane realized with exasperation that he must have taken Peddar's measure; he did not "Mr." him. Must she be servile, too, in order that he should not discover the difference in station between herself and her pseudo father? She tossed her head rebelliously at the very thought. This "workingman" should be put in his place! But she—she was a "working girl" herself now! Why couldn't she remember?

"Very good, sir." Jane could have slapped Peddar at that moment! "I shall try to remember, but it is all

very different up here from what I expected, sir. I'll go and have a look at the cottage you speak of."

As Peddar crossed the hall and vanished down the rickety steps Jane descended and entered the office with her chin in the air.

"Good-afternoon," Barney Hoyt smiled with frank pleasure. "Think you will like your job at the store, Miss Peddar?"

Was there an ironic emphasis on the last two words? Jane flushed hotly.

"I guess so," she responded cautiously checking the imperious rejoinder that rose to her lips. She must not give herself away to him, of all men. "There isn't much difference in selling goods over one counter or another."

"You have worked in a store before, then?" He eyed her keenly.

"If you want my references, Mr. Hoyt, you can get them from Mr. MacLeod in New York!" The retort was irrepressible. "I should have brought them had I thought they would be required here."

Hoyt's face grew grave, but there seemed to be an underlying twinkle in his brown eyes.

"I did not mean to be curious," he assured her coolly. "I know that it isn't quite the thing up here in Alaska to ask personal questions, but since I am in charge of the outfit, I did not think it amiss. And the outfit includes the company store, Miss Peddar."

"Over Mr. Pittinger?" she demanded.

He nodded.

"*And Jim Bowers,*" he supplemented. "You are just as much a part of the outfit now as one of the track layers or bull gang. But I came to ask you if you

would not like to let me show you where we start the road work next week. We're bringing it around just back of the bunk houses parallel with Main Street and it's only a step or two."

A curt refusal was upon her tongue but again Jane controlled herself. She must not let this chance to learn a little about the work slip by.

"I'll be glad to go if you will wait while I get my hat and cloak," she said quietly. "I must be back at the store for the three o'clock shift."

She inwardly raged at herself as she sped upstairs. How stupid of her to have allowed this odious young man to put her again in the wrong! If she had only known the identity of the chief engineer and that he would have discretionary powers over even the store, she would not have come one step of the way to Katalak, not even if the hateful Unatika Company gobbled up the Northern Star!

That he, of all people, should be in authority over her! The idea was maddening, but with a quick revulsion of feeling she giggled: why, if he only knew it, the tables were turned! It was she who was in absolute command now that Ollie was in France; she, the half-owner of the Northern Star mine! She could even order his dismissal if he became too impossible!

Then a steadying thought brought a quick flush of self-rebuke to her cheeks. If Peddar was drifting back into the personality of other days was she not also in danger of letting the old Janetta dominate over the character she had assumed, and which she must retain until the end if she were to play the game? Could petty personal spite toward a man who meant nothing to her,

a mere employee, be allowed to mitigate against the success of the work which meant not only her own future but Ollie's? What a selfish, arrogant little beast she was!

Of course, this man Hoyt was right from his point of view; in justice she had to admit that to herself, and she ought to be glad that he was so conscientious. As chief of the works he had to assure himself that every employee was not only competent but quite what they should be, especially in view of the underhand work with which he had to contend. She herself might have been a spy and confederate of the Unatika outfit, for all he knew!

In a considerably more chastened frame of mind Jane descended once more, and it was with a decidedly meek tone that she observed:

"I understood from Mr. MacLeod that the work had already started on the railroad. Of course, I don't know anything about it."

"The preliminary survey had been made and the road staked out before I came," Barney Hoyt responded. "I don't think you'll need that rubber coat, for the rain has stopped."

Jane laid the garment obediently over a chair in the office and thrust her hands in her sweater pockets as she followed her guide to the door. The rain had indeed ceased and a thin, pale sunlight was streaking down from a rift in the clouds, glistening on the sea of mud and tinting the pools which filled the ruts in the street with a faint opalescent color.

"You see, we've assembled all our equipment, chopped down spruce for our ties and cut them up in the saw-

mill," the engineer continued as they set forth. "Now we've got to start grading the first five miles of road-bed—but this must be all Greek to you!"

"What happened to Mr. Dugdale's arm?" Jane asked irrelevantly. "He would only tell me that it was an accident, but I have already heard about the accidents that have been happening up here all the time since the work started, and about that other company who want to put a road through, too. Do you anticipate any trouble, Mr. Hoyt?"

He darted a swift sidelong glance at her, but her face expressed only naïve inquiry and he shrugged.

"I expect almost anything on a job of this kind, but we'll be ready to protect our own interests if the other side start trouble, and we are going to push the road through, all right." There was no hint of bragging in his tone, but a quiet firmness which sent a little thrill through Jane in spite of her late resentment. "Don't let anyone frighten you, Miss Peddar. I don't think they'll attempt any open rough stuff, and if they should you will not be in it."

"If I had been afraid I wouldn't have come up here," Miss Peddar asserted stoutly. "They have only done just sneaking, underhand things so far, haven't they?"

"We don't actually know who is at the bottom of the mischief yet." He spoke with a note of reserve. "We'll turn down this lane here. You'll find it rather muddy, I expect, but you will get used to that if you stay."

"I'll stay if I can do the work at the store all right," Jane retorted. "I'm not a fine society lady, you know, to be afraid of mud and roughing it and—and soiling my hands. I'm a working girl."

She added the last slyly and averted her face that he might not read the lurking mischief in her eyes. If he recognized her he must speak now. At least, he did not know the name of the girl he had encountered on that far-off night.

"Of course, but Katalak mud is different from that in the East, and you are not accustomed to the life up here," he remarked. "You'll find a lot of things very different but you'll be fairly comfortable when you and your father get settled."

It was Jane's turn for a surreptitious glance, but his expression was inscrutable.

"Oh, father and I aren't a bit alike," she said carelessly. "He thinks he is adventurous but he isn't, at all. He has been dreaming of getting to Alaska for years and now that he is here, I think it all rather frightens him. Is this where the road is to be?"

They had passed the last of the huddled shacks on the side road which had ended in a vast stretch of mud, in which here and there patches of moss and coarse, stunted grass formed dank oases of green. Almost at their feet were the stakes left by the surveyors and they marched off, two and two, in a narrowing vista straight into the foothills to the north. Beyond them the faint, lofty line of the St. Elias range lifted snowy peaks against the still lowering sky.

Jane drew a deep breath. Somewhere there back of those foothills lay the Northern Star mine, the fortune which was to await Ollie on his return if only the man beside her were able to finish his task. Where those stakes led would lie an unbroken double line of gleaming rails, and down them would come the ore cars bring-

ing the copper to the wharf, the first stage of the trip to the smelters at Tacoma.

Could the miracle be wrought? It seemed a mere trackless waste of desolation about her now. In a few short months, at most, could that magic path of steel be built which would lead to the mine?

Jane lifted a glowing face to the young engineer's to find him gazing quizzically at her, and she lowered her eyes hastily in unwonted confusion.

"It—it seems like a tremendous job, doesn't it?" she asked.

"Not here. Of course, it's only a little single track jitney road anyway, but back up there we'll have to trestle over a narrow glacier bed, and if the other gang succeed in hampering us until they get their own equipment assembled there will be a real race for it." He turned. "We'd better be starting back now; there isn't much to look at yet, but I thought you would like to see where the actual work will commence."

"I'm glad I did," Jane replied. "I'm glad to feel that I am a part of it all as you said, Mr. Hoyt. Part of the work, I mean. It must bring a real sense of achievement to complete a job of that sort, even if you only help it along by selling things to the men who are doing it."

"I wish you would tell me where you sold things before," Hoyt said suddenly. "The reason for asking which I gave you back at Ma Heaney's wasn't all the truth, Miss Peddar. You remind me of someone I saw in the East not so very long ago, and yet you are unlike her after all."

"Who was she?" Jane asked audaciously.

Hoyt laughed and shook his head.

"The last sort of girl you would find roughing it up here! But you don't belong, either, you know. Store-keeping for a mining company is the last thing in the world which I should think would have appealed to you——"

"That's just because father was able to give me a little better schooling than he had himself, I guess." Jane laughed, too, but it sounded hollow in her own ears. What a dismal failure her attempt at dissimulation must be, when everyone from Ma Heaney to the head of the outfit could see through her like this! Still, he had not actually recognized her; there was a grain of comfort in that.

They had turned the corner of Main Street once more and were nearing the barracks-like bunk houses and mess, when above the increasing hammer and clanking of the pile driver and crane there came a hideous deafening roar, and somewhere back of and beyond the company store a flash of lurid red rose for an instant against the sky and died like the blast of some huge furnace.

Then came hoarse shouting and the heavy thud of many rushing feet, but Jane was scarcely conscious of it. At the first echo of the explosion Hoyt had dashed forward and now she was following, running as she had never run in all her life before. The bull gang from the storage yard over the way and the dock hands were converging in a crowd before what seemed to her to be the main office just beyond the company store, but as she neared it she saw that their interest was centered on the group of miscellaneous shacks clustered

behind it, from the midst of which a thin curl of smoke was rising.

She wondered vaguely at she sped past them why the men waited out there on the sidewalk, but she did not hear the warning shouts which rang out as she darted around the office shack and dashed through the clinging mud which clutched at her ankles; the chief had gone that way. Why did they not follow?

She rounded another shack and halted suddenly. One of the smaller ones, a mere shed, had collapsed utterly, its rainsoaked boards blackened and smoking. Beside it a solitary figure in overalls and rough flannel shirt lay stretched upon the ground and Hoyt was bending over it.

Changed as were the surroundings the scene brought back in a darting flash of memory that other time when Hoyt had ministered to the tramp her heedlessness had injured, but she did not give herself time to think of that.

Rolling up the sleeves of her sweater she sprang to his side and kneeling in the mud she lifted in her arms the bloody head of the unconscious man.

"Good God! What are you doing here?" cried Hoyt. "Go back! There may be another explosion——"

But Jane was not even listening. With her inadequate scrap of a handkerchief she was wiping away the warm blood from the boy's face—for he was only a boy, and there was a look of Ollie about his sandy hair and firm, square chin.

He was one of her own, one of her companions here in the work they were all doing together, and their common enemy had done this to him! She did not for an

instant question that there might not have been foul play, and a wave of mingled compassion and rage shook her from head to foot.

She clenched her teeth and sobbed through them.

"Those Unatika wretches! G—give me your handkerchief, Mr. Hoyt! The poor boy! O—oh, I'd like to——"

She was lifted bodily to her feet and spun about in the mud on them.

"Get out of this!" Hoyt ordered sternly. "Quick! I'll bring him!"

He picked the limp figure up in his arms and swung it over his shoulder and Jane meekly followed.

She did not know why the men cheered when they reached the sidewalk once more nor why that strained listening look died so slowly from the conglomerate mass of faces which clustered about them. The strange, savage rage had left her and she shivered and drew down her sleeves over her arms without noting the stains with covered them.

"Jumping Jupiter!" A pudgy hand seized her and dragged her aside. "What in Gosh- Almighty's world do you mean by taking a chance of gettin' yourself blown to Kingdom Come for a squarehead for!" It was Jud Pittinger's voice raised in a wail of admiring protest. "Don't you know there's dynamite stored all around there?"

"Will that poor boy live?" Jane demanded anxiously.

"You come along back and wash up and 'tend store!" Jud urged. "I never see the beat of it in my life! Walked right into livin' death, you did!"

"Well, the chief did, too, didn't he?" Without pre-

meditation the words leaped from Jane's lips and she did not note the change which her simple query brought to the faces about her, as man after man glanced shamedly at his neighbor and turned away. "What have they done with the boy who was hurt?"

"The doc will fix him up." Jud's good-natured face was still stern, but a look of confused deference was creeping over it. "I shouldn't have spoken so—so fresh to you just now but you scairt me! Come in the store and I'll get you a bucket of water before your father sees you, Miss. You got yourself mussed up some."

Jane followed him down the lane which the dividing crowd made for her, still dazed from the shock of the affair, and once in the store she leaned against the counter in the sudden limpness of reaction. It did not occur to her numbed brain what swift impulse had actuated her until a low voice at her side penetrated her consciousness.

"Miss Peddar, I want to take back what I said to you a little while ago, about your reminding me of someone back East whom I had seen." It was Barney Hoyt and he stood before her with a new look in his eyes. "She could never have done what you did just now."

Jane smiled faintly, and for the first time glanced down at her reddened hands.

"You were right, though, when you said that everything was different up here," she said. "How do you know what she would have done in my place?"

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN IN THE SHADOW

THE roar of the explosion reached Peddar at the farther end of the town, but to his unaccustomed ears, deafened by days and nights of continuous noise and clamor of machinery it seemed but a part of the general hubbub.

He was standing in a tiny front yard off the side street where already a few straggling plants were budding, lost in a disparaging contemplation of the little shack to which Hoyt had directed him, when a man running heavily past yelled at him:

“Hey, old-timer! Northern Star’s got it again! Company store’s blown up!”

For one awful moment Peddar’s senses reeled and the little shack blurred and wavered before his eyes. The next instant he had turned and was scuttling as fast as his trembling old legs would carry him back to the main street. He saw the crowd at the waterfront, and the store building seemed still to be standing, but where was his beloved young mistress?

As he swerved past the lodging house door Ma Heaney bounced down the steps and seized him in an ample grasp.

“She’s all right, Mr. Peddar! She’s in here!”

Peddar almost sobbed in his relief as his informant half-dragged him up the steps and into the office where

Jane, very pale but quite composed, was talking with the general superintendent.

"Oh, miss—Jane, I mean—you're safe? You're not hurt?" he gasped.

"Of course not, father! I wasn't even near when the accident occurred!" Jane explained hurriedly to cover that almost inevitable slip. "No one was hurt except one poor boy, and Mr. Bowers says that it isn't serious and he will soon be well. It was just one of the little shacks back of the store that went up in smoke. Was it an accident, Mr. Bowers? I mean, was that young workman careless?"

Jim Bowers' face darkened and his great hands clenched.

"It might have been his fault if he had been anywhere else but there!" he muttered. Then his anger flamed out unguardedly. "That dynamite stick was attached to a wire that trailed off east over the lots. I traced it myself just now for about fifty feet and it led to a battery somewhere like a fireblast. I lost the wire where it ran into the ground, but it is bound to have been cut away by now, and the battery may be half a mile away. The murdering scoundrels!"

Jane's face went a shade paler to hear her own belief confirmed.

"You mean it was the Unatika people at work again?" she asked.

He nodded.

"But they're not the only ones," he affirmed. "If they touched it off a day sooner the whole works would have gone up. There was enough dynamite in that shack a few hours ago to have blown all Katalak into the

bay! Hoyt and I got a hunch that it wasn't safe and moved it just in time, but somebody knew it had been there and told. We've got a traitor in camp."

Peddar shook in his shoes.

"If you've left it anywhere near the store still, Mr. Bowers, miss—my daughter shan't go back there again, not if the——"

"Father!" Jane interruptedly warningly. "You don't suppose Mr. Bowers is taking any chances on the whole plant, do you?"

"I'm not if I can help it!" the superintendent declared. "But I'm going to get them with the goods yet and when I do there won't be much work left for the marshal from Juneau except to take me up for manslaughter! They're showing their hand pretty plainly, and if I can once catch them in the act it will be all up with them! But don't you worry, Miss Jane, we'll take care of you all right if you'll just keep clear of any racket you hear started."

Peddar wrung his hands as the harassed superintendent took his departure.

"If you'd only give it up and come home——" he wailed.

"Home?" Jane's eyes flashed. "Home now, when I see for myself what those wretches are trying to do, and the lengths to which they will go to take everything from us! I'm ashamed of you! Think of Ollie away off there unable to do anything to protect the work, and then you think I would run away——"

She broke off as Ma Heaney bustled into the room.

"Well, there's no harm done, thank the Lord!" she remarked cheerily. "That young squarehead will be

out in a week and none the worse. I hear you've been looking at that shack Mr. Hoyt was goin' to take for himself, Mr. Peddar. It's the best one around here; Bud Sawyer built it for himself just before he got in that little argument with the faro dealer at the Full Blast, and it ain't been occupied since."

"What is it like?" asked Jane eagerly.

Peddar shuddered.

"Three rooms that would hardly be called closets, and you can see through the walls," he responded gloomily. "No running water except what comes through a hole in the roof, tumbled-down steps, no latch on the door and the floor gives with every step. When I think of you in a place like that——"

"Oh, Big Jim'll lend you a couple of men to put that right, and you can get a stove and pans and some bedding over at the miner's supply store," Ma Heaney interrupted briskly. "I can lend you a table and some chairs till you can order some up on the next trip of the 'Queen' and you'll be more comfortable than most up here. Time the flowers begin to grow——"

"Oh, is there a garden?" cried Jane. "That settles it, father. When can we move in?"

And it did settle it. In spite of Peddar's shocked remonstrances, a few days later found them more or less snugly ensconced in the little shack, and even he was bound to admit that it was an improvement over their former quarters. Big Jim Bowers had fulfilled Ma Heaney's prediction and his men did the rough carpentering well; the new stove did not smoke unduly and a lone Chinaman was found in the town who would come in now and then and help with the work which

neither the new settler nor his daughter were capable of accomplishing.

In the warm sunshine which streamed out between the daily drizzle of rain Jane's straggling little garden throve amazingly, and more than one shy offer of help was made to her in varying dialects by the men who came to purchase their meager luxuries of her at the store.

She noted one slight but significant fact in the days which immediately followed the explosion. She had ceased to be "Miss Peddar." From the general superintendent down to the lowliest of the bull gang she was "Miss Jane" to one and all except Barney Hoyt, and her heart warmed at the inference. In all respect and deference they were taking her in, making her one of themselves, one of the outfit. That rash unconsidered moment when she had in all ignorance rushed in where they had feared to go, even to follow their chief, had placed her in their estimation where months of diplomatic kindness in her store dealings with them would not have done, and she realized it vaguely but thankfully.

She was beginning to recognize faces in the slouching crowd, to remember strange, hardly pronounceable names and to greet some of her customers with a personal word that brought a flush of pleasure to many a swarthy, Slavic brow. Often as she watched them, awkward, silent and furtive-eyed through sheer embarrassment she wondered who the traitor could be; the traitor of whom Jim Bowers was so sure, who must have disclosed the location of the dynamite to their enemies.

Back in the first days after her arrival Jane would

unhesitatingly have said that from appearances any of them might well have been capable of it, but she was learning discrimination; learning, however slowly, to read the grim courage, and kindness, and chivalry that lay beneath the rough exterior.

It hurt her like an innuendo cast upon a friend to feel that any of the Northern Star outfit could betray his trust, and yet surely the superintendent's suspicions must have been well founded or he would not have made so positive a declaration.

The news of the higher grade stock and the importations added to it at the unheard-of prices had spread like wildfire, and had not Jud Pittinger carefully husbanded it and doled it out to her it would all have been exhausted in the first few days, but save for that surreptitious visit of Malison, the superintendent of the Unatika company, Jane could not ascertain that any of their rivals had risen to the bait.

A week passed with no further indications of trouble. The wharf and ore pockets were well on the way to completion, the pile driver and crane were still, and work had begun in earnest on the road. The clearing gang toiled night and day, excavating and grading, the steam-shovel chugged and rattled ceaselessly and every afternoon when Jane, drawn by an irresistible fascination, stole out to see how the work was progressing, it seemed to her that the narrow trail-like path shored up and reclaimed from the soft mud and tundra was lengthening itself slowly but surely and stretching out toward the foothills. The miracle was coming to pass!

She saw little of Hoyt. He seemed to be on the job with every shift; sleepless, tirelessly vigilant and lend-

ing his own strength in any emergency with a democratic camaraderie which yet brought with it no lessening of the strictest authority.

One afternoon on her return from watching the clearing gang at work, Jane found a bright-eyed, dark-skinned laborer loitering about the door of the store, but not until Jud's departure did he enter. Then he came deprecatingly up to the counter and with an ingratiating nod and smile began fingering the sacks of tobacco.

Jane watched him curiously. She was sure that she had seen him before; even in the maze of faces which rose before her there was something familiar and pathetically appealing in the wistful smile and soft dark eyes. He was an Italian, of course, and probably on the night shift, yet she wondered to which of the gangs he belonged. Why had he hesitated to enter when Jud was there? Could it be that he was one of the rival outfit? Then all at once she recalled him and smiled.

"Did you like the silk handkerchief you bought last week?" she asked.

The man smiled with a flash of white teeth in his thin face.

"Yes-a Mees! I come for see-a de raze, de raze in de little-a box."

He glanced over his shoulder and then eagerly back to her once more.

"You mean these?" Jane displayed the new razors in their ornate boxes and the man took them up in his hands with almost childish pleasure. "They are two dollars, but we have some cheaper ones."

He shook his head at the suggestion and selecting one, pulled out a slender roll of worn bills.

"This cut-a good," he announced and slipping it into his pocket he turned to go, yet lingered.

"Wait a minute," Jane said on an impulse. "What is your name?"

The man hesitated, embarrassed.

"Name Pietro." He paused and then came shyly toward her once more. "You like-a see my bambino? Got-a de pict, came last-a boat. I never see heem yet, me."

He took a cheap card-mounted photograph from his pocket and thrust it into her hands. It was none too clean and bore traces already of much handling, but Jane smiled warmly as she saw the face of a very young, very swarthy baby wrapped in a multitude of shawls.

"Oh, your baby!" she exclaimed. "And you've never seen it? It will be quite big when the road is finished and you go back."

The Italian's smile faded and he averted his face as he took the little photograph from her.

"Yes-a beeg," he assented simply.

"It is a lovely baby!" Jane was touched by the lonely man's confidence. "You must tell me about it and about your wife, sometime, Pietro. Where are they?"

But Pietro was casting uneasy glances over his shoulder and sidling toward the door.

"Some-a time, Mees, t'anks. I go now; late-a for de job."

He smiled wistfully once more, nodded and was gone while Jane started contemplatively to pick up the remaining razors. The man must be one of the Unatika

outfit; his apprehensive glances at the door, his palpable furtiveness and haste all betrayed him as an interloper. Yet he had been there before more than once, and he had ventured against just to show her his baby's picture, to gain a word of sympathy and friendliness in this strange, bleak land. If she in turn had succeeded in gaining his liking, his friendship, and personal confidence had come, could she not later win his confidence in other things, in the machinations perhaps of the company which employed him?

He had not looked like the sort of ruffian to be consciously engaged in the treacherous work afoot, yet he might be just stupid enough to do blindly what he was told, and to reveal it with childlike candor later to anyone whom he trusted. It might be that she had gained a foothold at last in the task which she had undertaken.

So absorbed was she in her cogitations that Jane did not observe when a tall figure darkened the doorway, nor glance up until a hated, well-remembered drawl fell upon her ears.

"Trade isn't very brisk to-day, is it, little lady?" Malison lounged familiarly over the counter, his curiously light eyes leering at her.

"Brisk enough," she responded shortly. "What do you want?"

"Nothing you've got to sell." He straightened and edged nearer. "Just a word with you. Look here, you got sore at me the other day but let's forget it and be friends. I was only kidding and you're the only girl around these diggings that I'd give a whoop for. I don't mind telling you that you've got me going, and I'm some hard to please. There ain't much a fellow

can do to show a girl a good time up in a hole like this, but if you'll make up and shake hands on it the next trip of the 'Queen' will bring up for you from Seattle the prettiest——"

"No, thank you." Jane shook her head. "I'm not 'sore' at you, as you say. I am here to sell goods, but not to take any insolence, and I have no desire to shake hands with you. If you don't want to buy anything please go."

"What a little spitfire!" He chuckled and made no move toward departure. "Mad still, are you? Danged if I don't like your spirit, but what's the talk of a kiss or two between friends? For we're going to be friends yet, little lady. I had my eye on you from the first day you landed, and if I started out wrong why, I'm willing to admit it. Know what this is?"

He had reached into his pocket and tossed out upon the counter a tiny object which gleamed with a score of darts of fire.

"A diamond!" Jane exclaimed, startled in spite of herself at the incongruity of the thing there among the sacks of tobacco and boxes of razors.

"And a beauty!" Malison nodded. "Found her myself in Brazil and had her cut two years ago in Frisco. Haven't seen a girl yet I'd give it to until now, but if you say the word it's yours."

He squared himself with an air of coming triumph, and Jane smiled.

"I don't want it. Please take it off the counter; it might get lost," she said. "Diamonds are a little out of place up here in Alaska and if you want my friend-

ship you will have to be a little more respectful than you've been in the past, my good man."

The note of disdainful patronage was a momentary and wholly unconscious reversion to the Jane of the past, but Malison's face darkened evilly as he swept up his rejected peace offering and dropped it into his pocket.

"All right!" he muttered savagely. "But don't try any of your fine lady airs on me! I know your kind and I'll make you sorry for this before I'm through with you!"

For an instant he lowered threateningly at her, then his expression changed swiftly and turning he strode from the store.

Jane gasped with relief and then smiled rather tremulously as Jud appeared in the door. Malison's ear must have been quicker than her own to detect the approach of her ally.

"Say, was that there Malison in here again, Miss Jane?" demanded Jud. "He's about the worst feller hangs around this town, besides being a Unatika man."

"I told him to go, but I couldn't very well put him out, could I?" Jane asked. "I don't see how he dares come in here in broad daylight with all your people about, but I didn't let him know that I knew he wasn't one of our own men."

"Well, you can the next time he shows his sneakin' face in here, and mighty quick, too!" Jud growled in unaccustomed wrath. "Orders is orders, but I ain't goin' to have a feller like him pesterin' you, Miss Jane! That there gat behind the counter ain't any more use to you than it would be to a kitten, and if I wasn't a

born fool I might've knowed it, but I'm going to get you a watchman's whistle, and if he or anybody else bothers you, just blow it. I'll tell the boys that if I ain't around and they hear it they are to come in and just naterally clean up the store!"

"I guess I—I'd like to have it," Jane heard herself reply, to her own consternation, and she mentally berated her weakness. Had she not boasted that she could take care of herself? What had she to fear from that man's idle threats? The whole thing seemed absurdly melodramatic and unreal now that he had gone, and rough as the town was she had met with no molestation elsewhere save in the store, where one scream would have brought practically the whole outfit swarming to her aid.

She put away the stock, told Jud of her single sale of the razor and started home to supper with her little chin held very high. She would *not* be a miserable coward!

As she left the store she paused for a moment to look down toward the waterfront where the wharf, deserted now by the hive of workmen who had swarmed over it only a week before, lay steaming in the sunlight after the recent rain. The ore pockets which lined its outer edge cast sharp, deep shadows backward, and as Jane looked it seemed to her that a man darted from one to the other of the pockets. She could not be sure, the sun was so dazzling and the thick-set figure seemed to have moved so quickly.

Her first impulse was to call to Jud, and she reflected that it might be one of the watchmen on guard and did

not want to appear officious. Jane decided to reconnoiter herself.

She walked slowly down the wharf, her feet making no sound on the mud which had sloughed up between the loose boards of the sidewalk, and made her way around the ore pocket at the end. No one was in sight and she was on the point of concluding that her eyes must have deceived her when, as she neared the third pocket, a man came hastily around its corner and met her face to face.

For a moment they stood staring, then the man nodded surlily, and putting his hands in his pockets strolled past her with an elaborate assumption of nonchalance.

Jane stood motionless, watching until his shambling figure had crossed the wharf and started up Main Street in the obvious direction of the Full Blast. She was undecided what to do; his errand on the wharf might have been a perfectly legitimate one and at the moment she herself had no right to be there. Undoubtedly he was an employee of the Northern Star; she had seen him in the store frequently and about the storage yard with the other members of the bull gang, and his face with its lowering brow, nearset, deep sunken eyes and wide, high cheekbones was not one which could be easily forgotten, although she did not remember ever to have heard his name.

Even should she report his presence there the girl doubted that she would be able to pick him out positively from so many other Russian and Slavic employees at the works if she were called upon to do so, and she resolved for the time being at least to keep her own counsel.

Yet as she made her way slowly home a disquieting thought pervaded her consciousness and would not be exorcised. What if he were the still undiscovered man who had betrayed the location of the dynamite to their enemies, the traitor to the Northern Star!

CHAPTER X

PIETRO

THE little side street upon which stood the shack where Peddar and Jane had taken up their abode started like a narrow alley, with ramshackle frame buildings standing shoulder to shoulder on either side, their porches crowding out over the single plank which served as a walk. Further on the houses thinned, with long gaps of open space between, and where the unfortunate Bud Sawyer had built his home only the deserted tumbled-down ruins of another shack fifty feet away bore it company.

As Jane passed it, her thoughts still busied with the man she had seen lurking in the shadows of the ore pockets on the wharf, she heard a faint groan which seemed to emanate from behind the heap of broken weather-stained boards, and paused. The place was eerie and deserted even in the paling light of the sun which was already disappearing behind a murk of cloud once more, and the Jane of a month ago would have taken promptly to her trim high heels, but now she hesitated.

If someone were ill or hurt, lying there all alone, someone of her own outfit—— Even as the thought came to her she heard another groan, deeper and more prolonged than before, and waiting no longer she picked

her way through the oozing mud around to the back of the ruined shack.

A man was lying there, his limbs twisted as though in pain, both arms crooked over his face and head as if to ward off a blow, and as she stood looking at him a sort of broken sob tore its way from his throat.

"Oh, what is it? What is the matter?" Jane asked pityingly, and then shrank back in horrified amazement as the man's arm dropped and he essayed to rise. His face was bloody and battered almost beyond recognition, one eye blackened and closed and a deep hideous gash ran across his cheekbone.

"Mees!" The word came in a sobbing gulp, and as he fell back again she saw that the knuckles of both hands were abraded to mere pulp. "Mees! Please-a you go! No place-a for you. Maybe he come-a back!"

"Pietro!" In spite of his mangled countenance there was no mistaking that soft voice, wistful even in pain. It was the lonely little Italian who had shown her the picture of his "bambino" only an hour or two before in the store. "Pietro, what has happened to you? Who has hurt you like this?"

There was silence for a minute, the silence of a race which keeps its own counsel and seeks its own revenge. Then reluctantly, through set teeth came the single word:

"Malison."

A partial light broke over Jane and with an involuntary shudder she glanced about her, but no one was in sight and she said decisively:

"I can't leave you here like this, Pietro, and I won't! Come! Try to get up and lean on me. My own home

is only a little way and we must get the company doctor——”

“No-a doc! I not your company; I Unatika——”

“I know that,” Jane responded quietly. “It doesn’t matter though; you must have some help. Try, Pietro.”

The wretched man made a determined effort, but his breath caught in a tearing sob and with one hand clasped to his side he fell back once more.

“He kick-a me in de reeb after I fall-a down.” The voice came faintly as if ashamed of the confession. “Please-a go, Mees! He come-a back, maybe keel-a you. He bad-a man!”

“He’s a great, big, blustering coward!” Jane cried indignantly, for the pitiable condition of the little Italian wrung her heart. “I can’t get you up alone by myself, but you just lie here quietly for a minute and I’ll bring my father. Don’t try to move; your face is bleeding so!”

She turned up the skirt of her dress, tore a wide strip from her petticoat and gently pressed it over the gash in his cheek, then turned and plunged off heedlessly through the mud. Suppose Malison should return to finish the work he had so dastardly commenced? She could have no inkling of the quarrel between the two, but there was no thought now of self-interest in attempting to gain Pietro’s friendship: the wistful little man had appealed irresistibly to her sympathies in the afternoon, and now she felt that they were leagued against a common enemy. She must get help, and quickly.

To Peddar, bending his dignified back over the uncongenial task at the stove there entered a veritable whirlwind, which seized him and bore him through the door and breathlessly along in the mud, replying to

his vociferous protestations by utterly incomprehensible allusions to someone who was badly hurt and someone else who ought to be shot, and ending with the imperative and impossible injunctions to "hurry."

When at length they reached the recumbent figure, Peddar drew back in horror.

"Oh, miss, it's murder as has been done! Whatever are you mixing up in it for? Come straight away and leave him to the——"

"It's not! He has been terribly beaten and we are going to take him home and help him!" Jane declared. "I—I know him; he is a friend of mine."

"A friend!" Peddar groaned. "If Mr. Geddes could hear you, miss, I'm sure I don't know what he would say, I don't indeed! And as for taking him home——"

"You kneel down there, *father*, and slip your arm under his shoulders," Jane ordered briefly. "I don't give a—a whoop what Mr. Geddes or anybody else would say, and you ought to know it by now! Don't mind about your clothes getting muddy—help him up, I say! Come, Pietro, try to help us."

Pietro only moaned faintly, but between them they managed to get him upon his feet, although it was evident that he was on the point of absolute collapse. He set his teeth, but groan after groan forced its way from him during the brief journey, and even Peddar's protestations were shocked to silence by the man's evident suffering.

They eased him down upon the cot in the kitchen, and Jane tore a sheet into strips for bandages while Peddar heated water on the stove, and forced some brandy between the man's bruised lips.

He murmured broken, incoherent expressions of gratitude for their ministrations and then lapsed into silence, but as Jane was completing the bandage about his battered head he started up from the cot in sudden alarm.

Jane's eyes followed his frightened glance to the door and she rose slowly to her feet. Barney Hoyt stood on the threshold.

"Good-evening," he said. "I—what has happened?"

"A friend of mine has been hurt," Jane explained briefly. "Come, Pietro, lie down again. Mr. Hoyt won't hurt you."

Uninvited, Hoyt entered and walking to the cot looked down upon the man for a moment in silence. When he spoke again there was a curiously repressed note in his voice.

"He isn't one of our outfit."

"No. He is employed by the Unatika people," Jane added. "Come out on the porch with me while Peddar attends to his side and I will explain."

Hoyt followed her in a noncommittal silence, and when she seated herself upon the steps and made room for him shyly beside her, he did not accept the mute invitation, but stood leaning against the rough spruce post which upheld the shaky roof, and waited for her to speak.

"You see, he's been buying things at the store—tobacco and handkerchiefs and that sort of thing—and I didn't know until to-day that he didn't belong to the Northern Star outfit," Jane began, angry at herself for proffering the explanation, and still angrier at her companion for making her feel that one was necessary.

"When he came in to-day he seemed so furtive and hurried and so afraid that someone would come in and find him there that I could not help noticing it, but Mr. Pittinger had told me to sell to anyone who came in, no matter who, without asking if they belonged to our outfit or not. I sold him a razor and he showed me his baby's picture and seemed so lonesome and longing for a friendly world like a—a dog that had been abused, that I felt sorry for him."

She paused, but Hoyt merely said quietly:

"Go on, please. How does he come to be here?"

"I—I found him just now back of that tumbled-down shack in the next lot, groaning terribly and with his face all beaten in. He said that Malison had done it, and had kicked him, too, when he was down! Just to see if my suspicions about him were correct, I told him I would get the company doctor, and he told me frankly that he did not belong to the Northern Star outfit but to the Unatika." Jane paused and added: "I haven't been able to find out from him yet what the trouble was about but I think it must have had something to do with his coming to our store, for just after he had left to-day Malison himself came in and he—he was impertinent."

"To you? What did he say?" Hoyt's voice was sterner than she had ever heard it and Jane replied hurriedly:

"Oh, nothing worth repeating. He was trying to—to make friends with me, I think, but I don't like him and besides he belongs to the outfit that has brought all this trouble to the Northern Star."

"Yet you take another Unatika man into your home."

Hoyt spoke with no suggestion of accusation, but as if he were trying to understand, and Jane drew a deep breath.

"Well, you see, Mr. Hoyt, he seemed so sort of pathetically anxious for a friendly word and so lonely this afternoon, that I thought he might be approachable in time if I gave him cause to be grateful to me."

"Approachable?" The young engineer seated himself suddenly on the step beside her and looked directly into her eyes. "Just what do you mean, Miss Peddar?"

"Simply that if there is a traitor in our camp, as Mr. Bowers says, it might be as well to have a friend in theirs," Jane added hastily. "I don't mean to meddle with things which do not concern me, Mr. Hoyt, but this Pietro doesn't seem to be a bad sort, and a lonely man will sometimes tell things to a girl who is sympathetic and has been kind to him that he would not slip to a man in the other organization. I know it sounds despicable, but it's only fighting fire with fire, and after that poor boy was hurt in that explosion last week I thought almost any means would be fair enough to use if it would be possible to learn their plans or something that would directly implicate them."

"By Jove, you are right, and it was a very clever idea of yours!" Hoyt caught himself up and added deliberately. "If it was your idea, Miss Peddar?"

He put the remark in the form of so unmistakable a question that Jane faced him squarely, with widened eyes.

"Why, of course! Who in the world would have suggested it to me?" she asked with an assumption of perfect candor, reflecting inwardly that she was at least

telling the literal truth. It had been her own idea from its inception in those far-off days in New York. "I know I am only employed to tend store, but I thought that if there were anything else which I might do to help without meddling too much, no one would object. We—we're all just working together, aren't we?"

"That's the spirit!" Hoyt rose, his eyes shining, and held out his hand. "Object? Miss Peddar, I would be only too thankful to you if you can learn anything which would help us to circumvent these scoundrels! I don't mind telling you that there may be grave trouble ahead; they are hindering us more than appears on the surface, and they are only waiting for us to do something lawless in retaliation in order to get the marshal from Juneau and stop our work altogether. But I will go in now, with your permission, and have a look at your patient to see if that brute Malison has injured him seriously."

Jane waited, gazing out over the bleak, dismal prospect to the foothills beyond with dreamy eyes. She was no longer angry, but rather glad of the interview, glad that she had explained her position to this masterful and yet singularly attractive young man. To him, of course, she was merely a little shop-girl and he must believe that the idea of worming herself into Pietro's confidence had only occurred to her on the spur of the moment.

He had approved, he had trusted her, and his hand-clasp had been the most encouraging and comforting thing that had happened to her since her arrival. It was odd, she reflected, how a little thing like that, a mere gesture from one of her own employees could so hearten her for the task which all unknown to him lay before

her. If he, with his queer socialistic ideas had suspected who she was, of course, he wouldn't have shaken hands with her for anything!

He was frankly friendly with her because he thought her merely a working girl, and he had been proud to declare himself only a workingman, and yet he wasn't at all. There was something beyond the unmistakable university breeding which would crop out, something beneath the purposely assumed roughness of his bearing which told her that if not actually of her own world he was at least beyond the class to which he almost defiantly allied himself.

Of course, perfectly nice young men of good family became construction engineers, but they would try to appear at their best, to raise, not lower themselves, and she shrewdly suspected that they would look largely and patronizingly down upon a girl who came to a rough Alaskan town to work in a mining company's store. It was all very puzzling.

Peddar came to the door and roused her from her reverie.

"J—Jane," he stammered, mindful for once of the listeners within, "Mr. Hoyt thinks I had better walk down with the man to Mrs. Heaney's. He can't get out to his own company's bunk-houses to-night, and that's the only place for him to stay. Mrs. Heaney is rather down on that other company, and I understand I shall have to persuade her to take him in."

Peddar's tone suggested no pleasure at the prospect, but Jane ignored it.

"'His own bunk-houses!'" she repeated. "You don't mean to say he is going back——"

"Yes. He says he must work as soon as he is able until payday, so as to get the money that is coming to him, if I can understand his lingo, and then he will go home. Mr. Hoyt offered him a place on the Northern Star, but he says they would kill him; the other people, I mean!" Peddar's voice had sunken with horror. "I—I'm sure I hope they don't offer him any violence on the way to Mrs. Heaney's, seeing him with me and knowing we are connected with the company here, as you might say."

"Of course they won't, father; don't be silly!" Jane rose and turned to enter the shack. "Is he really able to go? His ribs aren't broken, or anything?"

It was Hoyt who answered her.

"Not broken, but very badly bruised. He has taken a terrific beating, but I can't get out of him what it was all about."

Pietro, his swarthy skin pale beneath the bandages, was sitting on the side of the cot and as he turned a grateful eye upon the girl his swollen lips moved.

"He mad-a at me, maybe beat-a too if he know," he muttered gesturing with one white-swathed hand toward the engineer.

"No, Pietro, I'm sure he won't be angry, and I know he wouldn't hurt you if he were," Jane responded encouragingly. "Was it because you bought things from our store that Malison attacked you?"

Pietro nodded, half-fearfully.

"I bring them all-a back, all-a but de raze'!" he said eagerly. "I no right to buy off-a you, but our stuff no good, big-a price. Malison he see me dis-a afternoon. I see heem go your store too but he come-a out queek

and verra mad, black-a de look. He see me show de raze' one our boys, he come after me, tak-a de raze' away and do to me whatta you see. I theenk I die you no come feex-a me up, Mees. I no t'ank-a you, I no *can* t'ank——”

“That is quite all right, Pietro, and you need not return the things you bought. I am only glad that you feel stronger now and are not in such pain.” Jane smiled at him. “My father will go with you to Ma Heaney's and see that she takes you in. I hope that you will not have any more trouble with your superintendent.”

Pietro shrugged.

“I tak-a de chance,” he observed philosophically. “When I get-a my pay I quit-a de comp'; no good, not on de square.”

Jane waited with a little catch in her breath, but he said no more and she dared not question him in the presence of Hoyt lest she lose what confidence the Italian might have placed in her.

When he had departed leaning heavily upon Peddar's arm she turned to the engineer.

“You will stay and have supper with us, won't you? My father isn't a very good cook, I am afraid, but we have lots of canned things, and we would be so glad to have you.”

He shook his head smilingly.

“Thank you, but I can only stay until your father comes home,” he replied.

“I suppose it wouldn't do,” she answered mischievously. “It wouldn't be the thing for the chief of the

Northern Star Company to accept the hospitality of the humblest of his employees."

To her surprise he did not respond in like tone to her raillery. Instead his face darkened again and he said almost fiercely:

"You know that isn't the reason! Do you take me for a snob, Miss Peddar? Position and place make no difference up here, thank God. It is the work that counts. But I've got to get back to the job."

"It's progressing, isn't it?" Jane asked. "The other people have done nothing to interfere with you since the explosion, have they? I wish they would let me go to see that poor boy, but the doctor said it would not be establishing a good precedent."

"Hansen is coming along nicely and we will have him back at work in a few days, now." Hoyt paused and then turned to her with a curious boyish impetuosity. "I don't suppose you have any idea of it, Miss Peddar, but I want to tell you how much you did for me that day when you followed me to that demolished shack where the men themselves were afraid to go."

Jane smiled.

"I didn't know there was any danger," she said with naïve honesty. "They shouted to me but I didn't stop to hear what they said, or even to think."

"No," he repeated. "You didn't stop to hear or even to think, and when Jud Pittinger asked you why you had walked straight into danger, you said it was because I had gone. Do you realize what effect that had upon the men themselves? That you, a newcomer on the job, a mere girl, would follow where I led, unquestioningly, while they held back? I suppose I was fairly successful

with them before that, but I am a comparative newcomer myself, you know, and although they acknowledged my authority and seemed to like me in a sort of way I did not know how far I could trust them for absolute loyalty in a crisis. You shamed them, Miss Peddar, and I think if I know men that they would follow me into the very jaws of disaster."

"If they would, it is only your own personality which has done it, Mr. Hoyt." Jane turned away to hide her glowing eyes. "I hope they are loyal, but if there is really a traitor among them——"

"I am afraid there can be no question of that." Hoyt's face grew swiftly grave once more. "So many of these so-called accidents have occurred at or near the time when they could do us the most harm, that they must be obtaining inside information from some source. Bowers and I have talked with the men and studied them, but we cannot be sure and it is a pretty rotten thing to hold an innocent man under suspicion."

"Tell me," Jane spoke quickly, as a sudden thought returned to her, "who should have been around the wharf and the ore pockets this afternoon, an hour or so ago?"

"No one but the watchman." Hoyt glanced at her in surprise.

"Is he a Russian or a Slav? A thick-set man, with sunken eyes close together, and high cheekbones?"

"No. He's Pat Culhane, a big, blond Irishman." Hoyt's tone had quickened too. "Why do you ask? You didn't see such a man as you describe hanging about there, did you?"

Jane nodded and told him briefly of the incident of

the afternoon. He listened quietly, but when she had finished he rose and began to pace the floor.

"That description might fit any one of twenty men on the job," he remarked at last. "You are sure he is one of our outfit?"

"Oh, yes. He has been in the store half a dozen times with the others since I came, and I think I have noticed him working over in the storage yard."

"One of the bull gang, eh? Would you know him again if you saw him, Miss Peddar?"

"Yes, if I came face to face with him I think I should, but I couldn't possibly point him out from among the rest," Jane responded doubtfully. "Of course, I may have been unduly suspicious of his actions——"

"He had no right on the wharf, whoever he was," Hoyt declared. "When he comes into the store again, get his name if you can, please. I wonder——" He eyed her quizzically. "I wonder if this Mr. MacLeod, who has your references, really sent you up here just to tend store!"

Jane laughed frankly.

"He was rather dubious about my ability to do even that satisfactorily after my rather limited previous experience, but I begged so hard for the position that he finally engaged me."

"Why were you so anxious to come?" He had halted before her, but after one flashing, mischievous glance she averted her eyes.

"To see what it was like up here, of course, and then father was so wild to get to Alaska himself——"

A deferential cough from the doorway made them both turn. Peddar had executed his mission.

CHAPTER XI

HARVE DUGDALE COUNTS TEN

THE next morning when Jane came down Main Street toward the store in time for the seven o'clock shift she noticed idly that several men seemed to be patrolling the wharf, but her thoughts were busied with Pietro and his plight, and she gave little heed.

Jud Pittinger met her at the door with an oddly grim look about his usually smiling mouth, and it occurred to her that his ruddy countenance had paled.

"Has anything happened, Mr. Pittinger?" she asked.

For answer he took her arm and turning her around pointed to the wharf.

"You see them men, Miss Jane?" he demanded.

"Why, of course. What are they doing?"

"Lockin' the stable door!" Jud replied cryptically. "Only this time the horse wasn't stole first."

"What do you mean?" Jane's mind flashed back to her conversation of the previous night with the engineer.

"Them rascals was layin' to blow up the wharf, same as they did the dynamite shack last week, that's all!" Jud retorted. "Beats all tarnation how they manage to lay their wires right before our noses and no one gettin' on to 'em, but last night Mr. Hoyt come down here and

found 'em all fixed ready to attach to the sticks. Come dark, or what passes for dark up here between one and three, and they would have finished the job and touched her off, as sure as you're born, and when you come down this mornin', Miss Jane, me and the store would've been out in the middle of the bay; what was left of us, that is."

"But the watchman!" Jane stammered. "Where was he?"

"Snorin' like a bull alongside the third pocket. Said he only took one nip out of his flask, though even that ain't allowable, of course, and just keeled over. Looks like he was tellin' the truth, too, for when the Doc examined his flask there wasn't more'n one drink gone out of it, but the red-eye that was left was doped for fair: somebody must have got at it in the bunk-house and there don't any Unatika fellers dast poke their noses in there."

"One of our own men!" Jane exclaimed. It was on the tip of her tongue to mention the one she had seen skulking about on the previous afternoon, but she thought better of it. Hoyt had known and he had not taken the loyal but garrulous little storekeeper into his confidence.

"I'd like to get my hands on him!" Jud growled. "It's bad enough to have a bunch of ornery coyotes like that other gang hangin' around to run us out of town without a skunk in our own yard! When they find him the boys will just about eat him alive!"

Still voicing his wrath, he turned the books over to his assistant and went to the mess-house for breakfast, and when the morning shift changed and the men came

drifting in for tobacco and soap, Jane scrutinized each face carefully as she waited upon them, but the swarthy, sunken-eyed loungee of the wharf did not put in an appearance.

There were so many who did resemble him, however, that she despaired more than ever of being able to point him out, and as the morning wore on she felt a sense of dejection and discouragement stealing over her. To have seen the man and not be able to identify him had not been of much service to Barney Hoyt, after all, or surely he would have come in to tell her so, no matter how busy he might be. All unconsciously she watched the door, but only the track layers and road builders of the last shift came for supplies, and when Jud relieved her she went slowly home to dinner through the everlasting drizzle with a sense of disappointment which she would not admit even to herself.

After all, she was only masquerading up here. In a month or two, if the road went through she would go back and be Janetta Gildersleeve once more, and dance and play bridge and drive her car and forget that there was such a hateful, rainy, lonesome place as Katalak on the map! Why should it matter to her whether this young engineer, this hireling of her brother's, came to thank her for warning him of the man on the wharf or not? She had not done it for him, thank goodness, but for herself and Ollie, to protect their own interests. Why was she so silly as to bother about him anyway?

She found the mid-day meal which in courtesy they called dinner only half cooked, and Peddar in a sadly agitated condition.

"Oh, miss, there's been a man here to see you, a horrible person, if you don't mind my saying so."

When they were alone together Peddar frequently reverted to the original status which had existed between them in more normal days and although the girl usually corrected him sharply to keep him in practice she had not the heart to do so now at sight of his perturbed face.

"Who was it, Peddar? Don't rattle the stove-lids like that!"

"I don't know, miss, but he said he was a friend of yours, and he asked me questions that I wouldn't have answered if I could; I'd call them personal even up here, miss." Peddar's tone trembled with indignation. "As for the stove-lids, I'm that shaky I can hardly hold them! He came in and sat down without being invited, and when he saw that you wasn't here and he couldn't get anything out of me—for I as much as up and told him to go at last—he turned ugly."

Jane felt an odd sinking feeling in her breast, but she would not for worlds have let Peddar know the premonition which his words had brought to her mind.

"What did he look like?" she asked.

"Tall and dark he was, with horrid, gleaming, fishy eyes. If you ask me, miss, I think it was the same man who came and sat at our table that night in the restaurant, the first night we arrived. You remember him, don't you, miss? I'm quite sure he couldn't be a friend of yours though you have made some up here as would make your grandfather turn in his grave——"

Jane sat down in the nearest chair, feeling suddenly weak. So it had been Malison! He had dared to in-

trude upon her very home, dared to question her supposed father, to attempt to bully an old man! To what lengths would he not go in his annoyance of her? But above all things she must not let Peddar know; she could not trust him not to fly in a panic to Big Jim Bowers or Barney Hoyt and blurt out the truth about them both in his anxiety to protect her.

She took her hat off and flinging it on the couch ran her fingers lightly through her hair.

"Oh, you must surely be mistaken, Peddar," she said as indifferently as she could. "I don't know that man. The one who called here was probably someone of the outfit whom you haven't seen before, and I don't believe he meant to be ugly; that was just his way, perhaps. You know when we first came you thought they were all brigands and cut-throats at the very least."

"Barring Mr. Hoyt and the superintendent and one or two more, I've seen no cause to change my opinion, miss," Peddar retorted with dignity. "But this man—ruffian, I should call him—was the worst I have met since we came, although that is saying a great deal. He wanted to know all about us; where we came from, and why we came, and who engaged us and where you had worked before. It was when he wanted to know if you had a—a gentleman friend, miss, that I hinted he had better take himself off!"

"Did he," Jane chose her words with care, "did he ask anything about last night? About our bringing that poor Unatika man here and taking care of him after he had been so brutally beaten?"

"He made some sort of a joke about it, but I was so angry and worried about getting rid of him that I didn't

pay any attention." Peddar flapped a thin cloth out and laid it over the rough table. "I suppose that other affair is all over town by now, and I must say it was a very unwise thing to do, although Christian. I could have got some men from one of those cafés and had him carried off and saved all the bother, to say nothing of the scene I had with that Mrs. Heaney."

"What did she do?" asked Jane absently, glad to get his mind off his recent visitor.

"It wasn't so much what she did as what she said, miss." Peddar's face went suddenly scarlet. "Brazen, that's what she is! I really wouldn't repeat it, but to think at my time of life——" He broke off and pulled out a chair from the table. "Dinner is served, miss."

Jane smiled in spite of the blank terror which had turned her cold at the incongruity of the phrase in such surroundings.

"You are forgetting, *father*," she said as she took her seat and motioned to the one opposite. "If anyone should come to the door now and see you waiting upon me what would they think?"

"I shall never get used to it!" Peddar declared mournfully, as he obeyed. "If we could only be ourselves when we were *by* ourselves I shouldn't take it so hard, miss, but I feel as if your grandfather's cold hand was on me out of the grave every time I sit down here with you! The beans are a trifle burned, I am afraid, miss, but if you will try a bit of the cold ham and some potatoes——"

Jane essayed to eat but the food choked her. Had Malison's visit been a mere bluff to frighten her, or were they actually not safe from him here in the shack?

They were far from any other habitation, and Peddar was old. She had seen a specimen of Malison's brutality on the previous day; what if she were to come home from the store some time to find poor Peddar like that? What if——

She pushed her chair back and rose.

"I can't eat any more and I must hurry back," she said. "Mr. Pittinger asked me to be early to-day. Want any supplies from town for supper?"

"They've nothing there that we haven't, except salmon, miss, and I doubt that you'll ever be able to look one in the face again." Peddar made a wry grimace. "Thank heavens the steamer will be in with some fresh meat and vegetables in a day or two."

Jane forced herself to walk slowly back, but when she reached the cluster of buildings which bordered Main Street she breathed more freely.

Was it safe to leave Peddar alone there all day? Were they safe there together if Malison took it into his head to annoy them with his presence? Of course, they could go back to Ma Heaney's, but the thought of acknowledging that the man had frightened them from their home was as repugnant as the change itself would be, and it was equally distasteful to her to appeal for help from any of the outfit, most of all Barney Hoyt.

She had come there to take her place with the men as far as possible and to ask no favors because of her sex; must she admit her defeat because of a bullying ruffian who was not only her enemy but her brother's, who was one of the ringleaders in the plot to drive away the Northern Star outfit and halt the road to the mine?

Jud met her at the door of the store as in the morning, and she saw that this time he held a long string of knotted cigar ribbons in his hand.

"Here, Miss Jane; I forgot to give it to you this mornin', I was so het up about that business of the wharf. You just wear it around your neck where you can get at it in a hurry, and if anyone bothers you, give it one blast and see what happens. I told the boys to listen for it and come a-whoopin'!"

A brightly polished whistle hung from the end of the ribbon and Jane accepted it thankfully.

"It's awfully good of you, Mr. Pittinger." She slipped the loop over her head. "I don't want to be a trouble to you."

"Ain't a mite o' trouble; tickled to death to have you here," Jud declared stoutly. "Store's been like a different place since you come. There's one good thing about that there whistle; it's got a different toot to it than any other in town. I traded two of these here neckties and a box of scented soap for it to a feller who's goin' home from up country on the next steamer, and it's worth it. If you was to blow this nobody would mistake it for one of them the watchmen carry."

"Oh, I'm glad!" Jane exclaimed. "I wanted to ask you, Mr. Pittinger, if I might use it any time; when I'm not in the store, I mean? Do you suppose it could be heard if I blew it as loud as I could from—from home?"

Jud's smiling face changed.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Anyone been botherin' you or your father up at the shack?"

"No—o," she temporized, "but we live so far from

anyone else, and father isn't young, you know. I thought it would be so nice to feel that we could get help if we ever really needed it, though I don't suppose we ever shall."

"You can hear that whistle half a mile, especially now that the steam shovel is moving off along the road a piece," Jud responded, but there was a curiously set look about his mouth and he eyed her keenly. "Just you cut loose on that once, and you'll have the whole outfit at your door before you could say 'shoo' to a yearling shorthorn! I got to see Harve Dugdale about somethin' I forgot. I'll be back soon."

His precipitate departure might have caused Jane a moment of surprise at any other time, but she was still too perturbed over Malison's visit to give any thought to it. As she went about her task of rearranging the stock her hands unconsciously went more than once to her breast where the whistle hung concealed; at least if the need arose for its use help would come.

She was stooping beneath the counter removing the litter which the storekeeper habitually left in his wake when the voice for which she had unconsciously waited all the morning sounded from the doorway.

"Anybody keeping store?"

Jane's face, flushed from her exertions, rose precipitately to view.

"Oh," she remarked, "it's you!"

"I couldn't come before." Hoyt advanced to the counter and Jane saw that there was a worn, weary look about his brown eyes. "I tried to find an opportunity all the morning but I had to stick on the job with the

clearing gang. Do you know what you did last night? You saved the wharf!"

"Not I!" Jane smiled. "It was you; I heard how you found the wires that had been laid to blow it up."

"But I should never have gone near the wharf if you had not warned me. It isn't only what you have done for the Company but what this means personally to me that I have come to try to express my gratitude for. My reputation was at stake in this; if they had succeeded in demolishing the work of weeks and months—for the storage yard would have gone up, too—I would have been responsible."

"That is ridiculous!" Jane cried with unguarded warmth. "The Company knew before they sent you up here what odds you would have to fight against, and they could not expect you to be everywhere at once and guard the completed work as well as supervise the road building! I don't believe you have had an hour's sleep in the last thirty-six! You look simply tired out!"

The last observation burst involuntarily from her lips but he waved it aside with a gesture.

"How do you know what the Company expects of me and what responsibilities I assumed in the way of trouble when I took the job?" he asked with his customary disconcerting directness.

"Why—Mr. Pittinger told me," Jane stammered. "There was trouble from the Unatika outfit before you came, when the first engineer was here. Do you think that the man I saw yesterday was actually laying those wires?"

"Or keeping guard for a confederate," Hoyt replied. "I'm having every Slav in the outfit watched, but it is

bad business for it is bound to create disaffection among the men. It is more than ever imperative that we find the one who has been selling us out, of course, and I know I need not ask you to keep a sharp look-out for him. You are the only one with a chance of identifying him, Miss Peddar, and everything depends upon you now. When I send in my report to the Company I shall see that you get full credit for what you have done."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't do that!" Jane exclaimed in alarm. "I didn't do anything, I just h—happened to see that man and he may have had nothing to do with the attempt to destroy the wharf! I don't want any credit, I don't want to be mentioned at all!"

"Why?"

Jane was aware that the young engineer was regarding her steadily and a measure of caution returned to her, but her heart was filled with dismay. That report would go to Andrew Geddes and the name "Jane Peddar" would reveal everything to him! He would wire Hoyt to send her home; he might even come after her himself in the fullness of his anxiety and wrath at the trick she had played upon him, and he would most assuredly cable to Ollie and cause him boundless worry. Whatever happened, that report must not go in!

"Because I—I know Mr. MacLeod, the man who engaged me, and you don't—at least I don't think you do!" she floundered desperately. "He's a very hard man and he told me specifically when I came up here what my duties were to be and that I was not to overstep them."

"But that is nonsense——" Hoyt began.

"It isn't! Mr. Hoyt, if I do my work satisfactorily

here in the store it will not be necessary to mention me at all, will it? You came in here to thank me for a favor which I was able by sheer accident to do for you; will you grant me one now? Please do not mention me in your report. If you do I am certain to be recalled and I do so want to stay and see the road go through!"

The note of absolute sincerity which rang through her tones added to the bewilderment of the young engineer and he could only gaze helplessly at her. After a long moment he said quietly:

"It is rather irregular, you know, and I don't pretend to understand, but if you put it that way of course I must do as you ask, Miss Peddar. I merely wished to give you your due credit in the eyes of the Company, but if you don't want it that is your own affair. Why you should be recalled for rendering them a service is beyond my comprehension, but I do not want that to happen above all things. Your being up here has made a difference in everything. I—I can't tell you——"

He broke off suddenly and pulled up the collar of his rubber coat.

"I must get back to the clearing gang. I'll keep my word to you, Miss Peddar; you shan't be mentioned in the report, and—thank you for what you did last night."

He was gone, and Jane sank down on a low stool behind the counter. What a narrow escape! The possible danger of a report going in to Andrew Geddes with her own name and Peddar's involved had never occurred to her, and she felt limp with the reaction from her sudden scare. She must guard against that possible contingency in future, whatever Barney Hoyt came to

think of her. At least he must be sure of her loyalty, and that was some comfort.

“So it’s you and your damned supe, is it?”

A thick, sneering voice came on a whiff of brandy to assail her senses and Jane looked up hastily and then shrank back, one hand flying instinctively to the ribbon about her neck. Malison, obviously drunk, stood before her.

“That’s why you turned me down, is it?” he went on while she sat stunned. “Well, I’ll show you and him, too——”

Jane’s hand came down to her side and she rose.

“Mr. Malison,” she said very distinctly, “you have no right in this store. Leave it at once.”

“I’ll leave when I get good and ready and not before!” He came close to her, but she did not flinch. “So you know who I am, eh? Pietro told you that, I suppose! Well, he’s got more coming to him for that——”

“Pietro told me nothing,” Jane interrupted, still in an even tone. “I knew you from the start, and I warn you that if you come here or go to my home again and annoy my father and me it will be the worse for you. Now go.”

“I’ll go where I please in this man’s town and no one can stop me!” His furious, inflamed face was within a few inches of hers across the counter. “You thought you knew me, but you’ll know me a damn sight better before you’re through, you little——”

He never finished the sentence. Just as Jane’s hand was stealing again to the whistle a long, lanky figure precipitated itself through the doorway, whirled him

around and planted a huge fist with methodical precision upon his jaw.

Malison sprawled his length on the floor, and it seemed to Jane that in an instant the store was filled with men. She shrank back as Harve Dugdale bent jeeringly over the prostrate bully.

"Get up and put up your hands, you white-livered dog!" he cried. "Women and poor little Dago runts, that's about your meat, is it? Get up — — you, or I'll pull you up!"

The men crowded about expectantly, but Malison only cringed and tried to drag himself to the shelter of the counter.

"You won't, eh?" Harve straightened. "Look here, boys, this — — — don't show himself in town again, understand?" A rising murmur of assent came from the crowd. "If he does you'll know how to pick a fight that the marshal can't kick at and anything goes from rocks to gats! Clear the way to the door!"

They shuffled hastily into two separate lines, leaving a narrow lane between, and Harve bent once more over Malison.

"I'm going to start you on your way now, and count 'ten.' If there's hide or hair of you in sight when I finish I'll set the boys on you!"

Malison whimpered, but Harve seized him by the collar, dragged him to the door and with a well-placed kick sent him tumbling out into the middle of the street.

"One," began Harve. The men crowded to the door, shutting out Jane's view of what was going on outside. "Two—three—four—five—I thought you would, —"

you!—six—seven—eight—nine—*ten!* Look at him plowin' up the mud, boys!"

A storm of growls and jeers burst from the men and followed the fleeing fugitive up the street as Harve turned with a trace of sheepishness to Jane.

"Too bad to muss up your store like this, Miss Jane." He paused and added: "And I'm damn sorry I swore!"

CHAPTER XII

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

WHEN Jane neared the shack that evening at suppertime an unusually appetizing odor of good things drifted out to her, mingling with the low-hanging smoke from the chimney, and she entered to find Peddar seated in a corner with a scandalized look upon his face while a stout, uncorseted figure turned from the stove and greeted her with the wave of a pancake turner.

"Hello, dearie!" Ma Heaney called cordially. "Kinder thought you'd be along home soon. I come up to give you and your Pa a decent meal."

"That's very kind of you." Jane spoke in all sincerity. "Father has never done any cooking before, and I—I cannot seem to find time——"

"I guess you ain't any too used to it, either," Ma Heaney interrupted her with a shrewd, kindly glance. "Just you, set 'down, and I'll have this grub ready in no time. Say, that was a grand little battle while it lasted, wasn't it?"

Jane motioned frantically from behind Peddar's back, but her self-invited guest was oblivious.

"I was scrapin' the mud off my steps this afternoon when I see that Malison come flyin' out o' your store door and land in the middle of the street on the back

of his neck," Ma Heaney continued. "Then Harve showed himself and Malison got up and went kitin' down street and made for the hills like a dog with a tin can tied to him! Some of the boys told me about it afterwards, but how did it start, dearie?"

"A fight in—in the store?" Peddar quavered. "Were you there?"

He turned horrified eyes on the girl and she smiled reassuringly.

"It wasn't much of a fight, father. Mr. Malison came in and of course he had no business there, being a Unatika man, so Mr. Dugdale put him out."

"I should think he did!" ejaculated the irrepressible Ma Heaney. "He's been run out of town and I guess you don't know what that means in a place like this. It means that if he shows his face here again he'll get drilled full of holes, and a good thing, too!"

"They'll k—kill him?" gasped Peddar.

"Deader'n Daniel's cat, but he'll take no chances unless he comes back with his whole gang for a clean-up." Ma Heaney slammed the oven door with a clang. "Etta Carney's cuttin' up somethin' terrible. If I was you I'd keep out of her way for a day or two, Miss Jane."

"'Etta Carney?'" Jane repeated.

"Sure. You remember I told you about her. She was Hugh Malison's girl, and although he was tired of her before ever you come to Katalak, she just naterally blames you for what happened this afternoon; the whole town knows by now why he's been sneakin' into your company store."

"Do you mean——" Jane drew herself up to all her slim height. "Do you mean that I——"

"Of course not, dearie!" Ma Heaney patted her shoulder soothingly with one greasy hand. "But you can't stop a man like Malison from *lookin'*, unless you run him out of town like the boys done."

"A fight! You, to be mixed up in a fight!" Peddar had been fortunately oblivious to the latter part of the conversation. "I'm sure I don't know whatever will happen next, but that store is no place for you, and I shall certainly write——"

"Now, father!" Jane cried, "I wasn't mixed up in it, I tell you! I was behind the counter all the time, and it happened so quickly that I scarcely saw it. Please don't let us discuss it any more. Mrs. Heaney, how is Pietro?"

"That Eytalian that Malison beat up? Oh, he's all right, though banged up some. He went back to his own outfit to-day. I never would have took him in at all, only it was your Pa that asked it of me." Ma Heaney turned a beaming eye on Peddar, who shuddered. "When I like folks I'm just naterally wax in their hands, and can't say 'no.' I s'pose that's why I've buried three husbands. Well, supper's ready."

"You don't like the Unatika outfit, do you, Mrs. Heaney?" Jane asked as they took their places at the table.

"Not so as it's noticeable!?" Her wide, good-natured mouth set grimly. "I had 'em when they first come, and a wilder, tougher lot I never see! Not that that bothers me, for I've lived through four gold rushes in my time, but when they tried to cheat me out of what was comin' to me I threw the whole lot out, and they had to shift for themselves until they got their bunk-

houses built, back there in the foothills a ways. They're a bad crowd and Malison's one of the worst of 'em. I thought he meant trouble when he came out here this mornin', but I guess your Pa knew how to handle him; them kind truckle down to a real gentleman every time."

"Came here!" Peddar dropped his fork. "Did you say that this person came *here*, ma'am?"

"Well, nobody lives beyond you, and I don't know who else he could have come out to see," she remarked. "Lew Nagel, who tends bar at the Happy Days, said he saw him comin' from here this mornin' and I thought maybe he had been out to raise ructions about your takin' that Pietro in."

"That was Malison!" Peddar wiped his trembling chin and pushed back his chair. "If I had known it, I should have dropped dead here before him! It's a wonder he didn't serve me as he did that Pietro! And you said you didn't know who it could have been!" He turned to Jane. "I told you he looked like the man in the restaurant the night we arrived."

"It never occurred to me that it could really have been he," Jane evaded. "However, it doesn't matter now; we shall not be troubled with him again."

"Unless he gets the whole gang back of him and starts something in the open against the Northern Star outfit," remarked Ma Heaney. "I shouldn't be surprised if he did now, with or without orders from his own company, but I guess Mr. Hoyt——"

"Oh!" Jane rose as a low knock sounded upon the door and opened it. "Come in, Mr. Hoyt. Mrs. Heaney was just speaking of you."

"Thanks. You do look cozy. No." The visitor shook

his head smilingly as Ma Heaney started to set another place at the table. "I've had my supper. I just dropped in to see if Miss Peddar would care to come and see how the road is progressing."

"Run right along, dearie," Ma Heaney cried before the girl could speak. "Your Pa and I can clean up in no time, and you're cooped up all day in that store. I was just sayin' that I thought you could handle Hugh Malison if he starts something openly against your outfit after what happened to him to-day. You heard about it, Mr. Hoyt?"

The engineer nodded.

"It was coming to him, Mrs. Heaney. Harve Dugdale acted without authority, but he and the boys did exactly the right thing. I was sorry to learn that you had been subjected to such annoyance, Miss Peddar——"

"That was one of the chances I took when father and I decided to come up here, you know," Jane responded lightly as she slipped into her coat. "I didn't mind, really, and Harve Dugdale was splendid! I—I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!"

He smiled at her as they left the shack and Peddar to the tender mercies of Ma Heaney, and started down the rain-soaked plank walk.

"I didn't know that you were such a bloodthirsty young woman," he said.

"I didn't, either! I never saw a fight before," Jane confessed with a laugh, and then her face sobered. "I feel as bloodthirsty as a savage when I think of the Unatika people! If they only would come out in the open and fight fairly one would have more respect for them, but this way of striking in the dark is abominable!"

It makes one almost want to descend to their level and hit back."

"When the time comes, perhaps we shall." Hoyt's expression, too, had grown stern. "They are getting their own storage yard ready a mile or so beyond the other breakwater and that means that they will begin soon to assemble the material for their road; perhaps the first consignment may get in on the steamer which is due to-morrow. When it comes I shall know whether or not a certain suspicion of mine is founded on fact."

Jane glanced up at him quickly.

"You mean?"

"That I should not be surprised if the road they hope to build would be of the most temporary character, just stable enough for them to claim the right of way if they succeed in laying their rails," he replied. "If they can run a single engine and flat car over it for three months, I have an idea that it will be the limit of their road's endurance."

"Oh!" Jane exclaimed indignantly. "They hope to run the Northern Star out in that time and get your road as well as the mine?"

"Possibly, but I suspect that if they should succeed in gaining possession of the Northern Star mine the operations on the Unatika itself would be suspended indefinitely. I have been hearing some queer rumors about the value of their mine. I should not speak of it to anyone else, and I don't know why I am telling this to you now, Miss Peddar," he added. "I haven't any proof yet, but the Unatika haven't tried to float any stock, and from all one can see they have barely scratched the ground. Their mine may be worthless;

their claim merely a blind to give them an excuse to gain possession of the right of way, and buy in the Northern Star at a dead loss to our company."

"You have no idea who the owners of the Unatika are?" Jane asked.

"No more than I have as to whom I am really working for myself," responded Hoyt. "Our own company is as much under cover as the other outfit."

"Did Mr. MacLeod engage you, too?" Jane spoke on a sly impulse.

Hoyt shook his head.

"It was someone else; an agent, I believe." His tone was carelessly noncommittal. "I know we're on the level, though; know it from the instructions which were given to me, from the very way the whole proposition was put into my hands. If I hadn't assured myself of that I wouldn't be here, and now that I *am* here I'm going to put the road through in spite of the Unatika outfit."

"I'm sure you will!" Jane cried. "I only wish that I were a man so that I might help more, too!"

"But you are helping. With your influence, the example of your spirit you are worth any three men in the outfit." Hoyt's tones were lowered and insensibly he had drawn closer to her side on the narrow walk. "The boys regarded you with a wondering sort of respect for coming up here, but they worship you now for your pluck and friendliness and cheerful comradeship. They may be an ignorant, rough lot for the most part, but they can recognize the difference between you and the sort of woman one would expect to find in a job like yours as quickly as I can. You have slipped into the life here with wonderful ease in a way, and

yet it isn't your sort of life, nor anything like what you have been accustomed to; anyone can see that."

"Well, I've always lived in civilization, you know," Jane parried. "You—you're sort of an anomaly, too, Mr. Hoyt. You pride yourself on belonging to the working classes—to us, I mean—and yet I don't think you do really, or at least you haven't always. But I forgot! One mustn't be personal in Alaska, must one?"

"I have always worked," the engineer replied slowly, ignoring the latter part of her speech. "A construction man on a job of this sort must eat and sleep and work and live with his outfit, and he's got to get under the skin to know them. But a woman—especially a woman like you—on this job you've tackled, is up against a more difficult proposition than I think you realize even yet. I feel in a way responsible for you——"

"So do all the boys, it seems!" Jane said hastily. "And they are such dears! See what Mr. Pittinger gave me to-day."

She pulled out the whistle and told him how it came to be in her possession, and he listened with a very grave face.

"I think I understand the motive behind that order from headquarters to sell those goods below cost to anyone who came into the store, but you should never for instant have been subjected to the insults of a man like Malison," Hoyt remarked. "If you had come to me or Jim Bowers——"

"But don't you see, I didn't want to go to anyone," explained Jane. "If I could not take care of myself I had no business to come up here at all, but I am grateful for the kindness and protection of Mr. Pittinger and

all of you! Somehow, I don't feel nearly as independent as I did when I came. I am not a bit afraid of the future, but I think I must have been at that time and my attitude was just sheer bravado! Now I—I'm glad of the friends I've made and the feeling that I am one with you all. I never thought that men like these——"

She stopped in some confusion, but Hoyt finished for her.

"You never thought they would be chivalrous and protective toward a good woman? Perhaps that's because you never thought about them at all, Miss Peddar. You've never come into direct contact with them before."

"With working people, of course, but not just this kind," Jane amended lamely. "I'm learning a lot, Mr. Hoyt."

"And we are learning from you." His voice trembled slightly. "We are learning what a real woman's influence means, and that there is a girl in the world like you, plucky and staunch and truehearted, makes it a better place to live in even here."

Jane gasped and stole a second shy glance at him, but his face was deeply serious and for the first time she noted a look of repressed bitterness about his clean-cut mouth as though with his words had come a flash of some reminiscent thought which was not without pain. More than ever she longed to know his story, but she dared not probe for it now.

"I'm not all that, I am afraid," she responded quietly. "I'm just a girl trying to earn my living in rather unusual surroundings and to make the best of them. O—oh! The road! The railroad at last!"

They had long since left the plank walk behind them and, plowing through the mud, had come to the place where he had brought her on the occasion of their first walk together nearly a fortnight before. The double row of stakes which she had seen had given way to a hardpacked straight path crossed with the raw new spruce ties upon which lay gleaming lengths of rails waiting to be spaced and spoked into place, the fish-plates already bolted over the connecting ends. The single-track railroad was indeed assuming form and a semblance of reality. The miracle was at hand!

"It will be, in a few months," Hoyt replied, as much to her unspoken thought as to her exclamation. "Ordinarily it would take three months to complete the first five miles, but I'm running three shifts and putting on all the pressure I can and in another month we'll be up to the glacier bed there in the foothills. We'll have to trestle that, but afterwards it will be plain sailing as far as the Unatika people are concerned. If we can get the road across that glacier bed it will be too late for them to interfere further and the race will be practically run."

"In another month! And you say that they haven't even got their materials assembled yet?" Jane demanded. "Why, they haven't a chance, have they?"

"Not unless they hamper us still more and bring down some disaster upon us that we cannot avert," replied her companion. "They know that as well as we do, and the next month will be the crucial one."

"What is that thing up there with the long boom sticking out of it, just beyond where the rails stop?" Jane pointed in fine disregard of the manners of the past.

"That is the steam shovel. It is idle now, but tomorrow I am going to run a flat car, the first over the line, as far as the rails have been spiked into place and clear out that pile of mud and gravel the clearing gang have left behind them——"

He paused as a slouching figure appeared up the track and slowly approached. At the next moment the figure halted, stood for a short space irresolutely, and then came on.

"Who is it? The watchman?" Jane's tone had quickened. "He came from around the boom of the steam shovel."

"No, and I'd like to know why he's off his job!" Hoyt exclaimed. "The rest of the clearing gang are working up beyond. Oh, it's Mirko. He's not on in this shift. He's a lazy fellow; wonder what he has shown up for during his time off?"

The man neared them and would have passed with a surly nod but the engineer drew him to one side for a moment. After a low-toned colloquy the man went on, but Jane's eyes followed him as long as he was in sight.

"He had lost something and came back to look for it," Hoyt rejoined her. "As near as I could make out it was one of those little sacred images they carry about with them as a sort of mascot. These Russians are more superstitious than negroes."

"If I were you I would look for that little sacred image myself, Mr. Hoyt," observed Jane quickly. "That is the man I saw lurking about the wharf just before you found the wires set for the explosion!"

"You are positive of it?" he asked eagerly.

"Absolutely! I could not be mistaken; I have watched for his face all day in the store, and I know that I am right. His walk, his manner, everything is the same, and I could not forget his sunken, close-set eyes."

"Then there is work for me to do here without a minute's delay. Miss Peddar, do you mind going home by yourself? You'll be quite safe——"

"Of course, I don't mind!" Jane held out her hand. "You'll come and tell me to-morrow if he has been up to any further mischief, won't you?"

Hoyt promised and, shaking hands with her, strode off rapidly down the newly made track. Jane watched him until his figure had melted into the curtain of misty rain which had begun once more to descend upon them, then turned and made her way slowly home. Her discovery of the Russian's identity had brought with it no elation; it seemed almost unimportant beside that strange, bitter look which she had surprised upon the face of the young engineer on the very moment after he had praised her with such amazing candor and warmth.

Had she all unconsciously recalled to him some other girl who had not been "staunch and truehearted?" Was another girl at the bottom of the mystery which she felt surrounded him, or did that mystery exist only in her own absurd interest in this young employee? He might be only what he pretended, a quite ordinary boy who had worked his way through an engineering course somewhere, and the girl—if there were a girl—was probably a common little thing.

Jane shrugged as she slopped her way through, the mud and drizzle. Barney Hoyt's possible love affairs

were nothing to her, of course; she was just lonely for the city and her friends and the old life. Well, in a month it would be over. He had said that the race would be practically run when they reached the trestle, and she realized that she need not stay for the completion of the road, after all. She could go to Persis in Maine for the rest of the summer and not only make good her alibi, but forget that she had ever seen Katalak.

The next day, however, brought an event which drove Hoyt and his affairs from her mind, and equally banished all thought of deserting her post. The "Queen" arrived punctually with the tide and in a rare burst of sunshine Jane stood in the door of the store watching the landing of the few passengers she carried.

They appeared to be miners for the most part, on their way up country, and Jane was turning away when she heard a subdued guffaw from the men grouped near the door and caught sight of a strange figure making its way gingerly up the street. It was that of a young man clothed in corduroy knickerbockers and a shooting coat topped by a mackinaw of exaggerated London make. His feet were womanishly small, and immaculate leather leggings covered his exceedingly thin, long legs. A checked cloth cap was perched at a rakish angle upon his sleek head and the face beneath it, clean shaven and none too strong of feature, seemed vaguely familiar to Jane.

Where could she have seen this preposterous young man before? Surely no one from the East would have business in this out-of-the-way corner of Alaska, and she could not place him among her acquaintances at

home. She watched while he hesitated before Ma Heaney's door and finally disappeared within. Who could he be, and what was he doing here?

Jane returned to her place behind the counter in a perplexity which deepened with every moment that passed. She knew him unquestionably; the conviction strengthened the more she sought to combat it, and all at once a scene returned to her mind. A ballroom, lights and flowers and music and a young man who danced abominably and flirted more abominably still.

The vision and the significance of it made her senses whirl. It could not be! Memory was playing some hideous trick upon her! What could bring Ronald Winfield, the son of the Gildersleeve's implacable enemy, to Katalak?

CHAPTER XIII

“J. BARNABY HOYT”

OVERWHELMED by the shock of her discovery, Jane sank down on the little stool which Jud Pittinger had installed behind the counter for her and rested her chin upon her hands. Another memory returned now with sickening significance: that scrap of paper with “Northern Star” written upon it in Adele Everton’s hand, which she had found on the last night in the old home, slipped between the leaves of the map of Alaska in Ollie’s encyclopedia.

Her erstwhile chaperone was somewhere West now, in Winfield’s private car. She had known of their ownership of the Northern Star mine and had undoubtedly betrayed them to their enemy! Ronald Winfield must have been sent up here by his father to spy out the land, to find out who was in charge of their operations and learn what could be done to wrest the mine from them and drive them once more to the wall! Perhaps when he discovered the state of war which existed between them and the Unatika outfit, his father would buy a controlling interest in the latter mining company and bring the fight into the open. Perhaps——

As a swift, almost incredible thought came to her Jane sprang to her feet. Had Uncle Andrew been mistaken after all? Every word of that momentous conversation in the old attorney’s office on her birthday

came back to her as though it had taken place only the day before, and she recalled his half impatient reply when she had asked the identity of the Unatika Company: "A group of copper operators here in Wall Street . . . no standing among the big fellows . . . just a ring of the smaller fry."

Her query as to Winfield's possible connection with them had been carelessly denied and scorned, but Uncle Andrew had known that their enemy was not yet satisfied with his revenge upon them, that he would go to any length to beggar them. What if this fight meant something more than the mere right of way for a single-track railroad? Could it be that Gordon Winfield himself was the Unatika Mining Company?

Jane caught her breath sharply. If only Ronald failed to recognize her! That one meeting in the Cheevers' crowded ballroom, a single dance together, five minutes in the dim conservatory; would his memory of it serve to connect the shabby assistant storekeeper of Katalak with the radiantly clad society girl of that evening? She had recognized him, but she had had greater reason to remember him after the revelations of the following day, and here he was in no disguise save that provided by his own bizarre idea of a proper outfit for his environment.

If he did recognize her the case would be hopeless, but if he did not— A daring plan had leaped fully matured into her mind, and Jane felt that she must put it to the test at the earliest possible moment. If the Winfields were really back of the Unatika outfit she must get word to Uncle Andrew at once through Adam MacLeod, and how could she learn the truth save from

Ronald? He was as snobbish as all social climbers, fatuously vain, a braggart and a would-be Lothario; this much she had gathered from their initial meeting. If he were weak, as well, and his conceit could be touched and played upon by the possible infatuation of an insignificant little shopgirl with his august self, even though she were in the employ of the rival company, might he not reveal his mission in Katalak to add to his aggrandizement in her eyes?

A little shudder swept over her at the thought of the part she must play if she were to succeed. Could she carry it through, deliberately attract the attention of this bouncer, permit his advances, lead him on to a possible disclosure? She remembered that tete-a-tete in the conservatory, and his insolent attempt at gallantry which had so offended and repelled her even before she knew what cause she had to detest any of his breed; if he used such tactics with a girl of his own world how would he approach one whom he considered a social inferior? Could she school herself to a humble, admiring acceptance of his condescending attentions until her object was attained, in the event that he did not realize her identity?

So engrossed was she in this newly arisen problem that she was not aware that anyone had entered until a voice almost beside her made her start.

"Are thoughts for sale here, Miss Peddar? I have a penny——"

It was Barney Hoyt, watching her with a quiet smile.

"That would be too high a price to pay for them, Mr. Hoyt." She smiled back, conscious of a silly and unaccountable flush which for no earthly reason had

mounted to her brow. If he could know the plan which had formed in her mind what would he think of her! "Besides, the stock is sadly depleted, but if there is anything else you wish to buy——"

"I came to keep my promise; to tell you about Mirko." The bantering note was gone and his tones were lowered and grave.

"Oh!" The encounter with the Russian on the previous evening returned to her mind with something of a shock. "Was he the man who has been betraying you to the Unatika people? Did you find out anything?"

"Mirko is under guard in one of the bunk-houses; he will not be allowed to communicate with anyone until he is put aboard the steamer for her return trip." Hoyt's face was stern and his brown eyes flashed. "Thanks to you again, Miss Peddar, I think we have found our traitor. When I left you last night I examined the steam shovel; the bridle on the dipper had been loosened deliberately by the removal of the cotter pin. I know that doesn't convey anything to your mind, but it means that when the boom is lowered and the dipper scoops up a load of sand and is pulled up again it will slip off in midair and whoever might be standing beneath would be crushed to a pulp. I had Mirko seized and searched and the cotter pin was found upon him."

"I knew it!" Jane cried. "I was sure he was the man who had laid the wires to blow up the wharf the minute I saw him! Did he confess? Did you learn who had induced him to turn traitor?"

Hoyt shook his head.

"They're stubborn, these Russians, and they will take a lot of punishment. I put him through a third degree

that the old police system could not have surpassed but he would not admit anything; swears he knows nothing about the explosion at the dynamite shack or the attempted one at the wharf, and hinted at a private grievance against some member of the clearing gang, but that of course is a mere subterfuge. When he was searched a money belt containing more than four hundred dollars in bills was found upon him and the most casual computation proved that he could not have saved more than a hundred from his wages since he came to work for us."

"Could he not have brought some of it with him?" Jane asked.

"No. He was broke when we took him on; we had to advance him money to pay for his outfit and tobacco. The scoundrel was bribed, of course, but he won't give his confederates away." Hoyt paused and then added: "However, we can count ourselves lucky in having found him out and ridden the outfit of such carrion, and it was all due to your quick eye and keen memory, Miss Peddar. If you had not recognized him and warned me we would have had a serious and perhaps fatal accident to-day when I put the steam shovel in operation again. It would not have delayed us in the work on the road, but it would have had a disastrous effect on the morale of the men, and that is what the other side are counting on to further retard the work. If they could bring about a strike, or terrorize any number of the outfit into deserting us the result would be quite as much to their purpose as the destruction of our buildings and materials. To keep the road from going through; that is their ultimate aim, but by heavens they,

shan't do it! Not while I'm above ground and have enough of an outfit left to man a single shift!"

Jane rejoiced at the fire in his eyes and the grim determination which rang through his tones. Then like a sudden stab came a realization of what his words implied.

"While you are above ground?" she echoed. "You don't mean—you don't think they would harm you?"

"I haven't the least doubt that they will try if their other efforts fail," he responded carelessly. "For the sake of the road I shall take very good care that they don't succeed."

"For the sake of your friends, your family——" Jane stammered.

"I have neither." There was no trace of bitterness in his voice nor in the smile which accompanied the admission. "There isn't a soul to care, thank fortune! I don't have to lie awake nights worrying about how anybody would feel if an accident should happen; it's mighty convenient."

"Don't!" Jane cried impulsively. "It is dreadful to talk—to think that way! Why, everyone in the outfit, at least, is your friend except that renegade you are shipping back——"

"And it is due to you that we discovered his treachery." Hoyt seized with obvious eagerness upon the opportunity to change the subject, as if he already regretted his half-confidence. "I came only to tell you and to thank you, and now I must be getting back. I have the work geared up to the last notch, you know, to bring the road up to the glacier bed on time and I

must stick on the job myself. Thanks for your opportune help in spotting Mirko."

For some time after he had gone Jane stood staring out the doorway with unseeing eyes. No friends, no family, not a soul to care! Her heart cried out in sympathy even as she realized that he stood in no apparent need of it. He was so self-reliant, so eminently able to stand alone and so determined to shut everyone out of his life that if he were indeed friendless it must be from deliberate choice. She recalled his swift changes of mood, the hard, stern repression which followed each impulsive speech of more than casual cordiality to herself. Something, someone must have hurt him terribly in the past. Could it have been another girl?

As she stood there in the door Jane became aware that someone was gazing fixedly at her and raised her eyes to see Ronald Winfield halted on the other side of the street and staring straight into her face with a self-conscious smirk. Did he recognize her? She shrank back out of view, but not before a tide of crimson had flooded her face and the young man, smiling broadly, sauntered on down to the wharf.

That he would present return on her side of the street Jane had no doubt. The crucial moment on which all her future plans hung was at hand and her courage rose to meet the test. Slowly she approached the door once more but stood just within it where he could not see her until he was abreast of it, and waited with a wildly beating heart.

Her face felt as though it were burning up, but she told herself recklessly that it was just as well; if he failed to connect her with Janetta Gildersleeve, he would

think that she was blushing because of his gaze. She shrank in self-disgust from the rôle she had assumed but her determination did not abate. She must know if their enemies were back of the Unatika antagonism.

At length she heard his swaggering step approaching and lowered her eyes until he reached the doorway, when she flashed a quick, upward glance at him and turned away in well-simulated confusion. He paused, stared boldly at her for a moment, and then stepped within.

“Good-morning,” he said. “Nice little store you have here.”

He had touched his cap but did not remove it, and as she raised her eyes once more she saw that his were alight with admiration and anticipatory interest. He had not recognized her! He had stopped merely to amuse himself by jollyng the little shopgirl! The wave of relief which swept over her was stemmed by the cynical resolve that his wish should be fulfilled.

“It isn’t a general store, sir,” she replied demurely, “it belongs to the mining company who built all that out there, to sell supplies to their employees, you know.”

She gestured vaguely toward the wharf, and he nodded.

“You didn’t think I wanted to buy any of this junk, did you?” He laughed. “I wanted to say ‘hello’ to the prettiest girl I’ve seen this side of the Rockies.”

Jane retreated behind the counter, forcing a smile which she took care to let him see.

“I’m only the assistant here,” she murmured. “If the storekeeper came in and found you k—kidding me there

would be trouble. Besides, my father doesn't let me talk to people I don't know up here."

Ronald laughed at her prim tone.

"Good Lord! Conventions in this hole!" he scoffed. "Say, what on earth do you do for amusement here, anyhow? There isn't even a motion-picture house that I've been able to discover, and I've been all over the beastly place in the last hour."

"There will be one next month, I believe," Jane replied. "The general superintendent is going to put up a shack and get some reels from Ladysmith or Tacoma. But you really must go; the storekeeper will be here any minute."

Ronald leaned carelessly over the counter.

"Tell me your name and I will," he announced. "You're the only live thing I've seen around here."

"Oh, no! I mustn't! Father would be so angry——" Jane shrank back with a shocked expression. "Please go!"

Her tone was deprecatory and pleading, but not displeased and Ronald smiled again.

"All right. Don't want to get you into trouble, you know," he conceded with maddening condescension in his patronizing tone. "I'll bet you I will find out your name within an hour, though!"

"I won't take you up on that." Jane smiled, too. "Good-morning."

Ronald swaggered to the doorway and all but collided with Jud Pittinger, who fell back in sheer astonishment at the apparition.

"What in creation was *that* doing in here?" he demanded when Ronald had sauntered forth. "Saw him

when he landed and couldn't scarcely believe my eyes. Never see such a get-up in my life!"

"He thought this was a general store, but I told him it belonged to the company," Jane responded. "He does look sort of queer, doesn't he?"

"Queer!" Jud snorted. "If he don't get him some regular clothes he's liable to be lynched! Looks as if he stepped out of a comic opery! Well, you go along home to dinner now, Miss Jane, and you needn't hurry back if you've got any little fixin' to do for yourself or your Pa around the house. I can attend to the three o'clock shift."

Jane shook her head as she thrust her arms in the sleeves of the coat he held gallantly for her.

"I'm not half earning my salary! You are all spoiling me, between you!" she declared. "I won't know how to really work when we go home; it's just play up here."

She left the store pondering on her late interview with Ronald. If he had received the impression she had attempted to convey he must think her a helpless, unsophisticated little fool. At any rate, he was interested enough to want to know her name; it was a beginning. She loathed him unspeakably, not only on account of his blood but for what he himself was, yet she loathed herself still more. A vampire in a silly rubber hat and mackintosh, that was what she was! The thought of the incongruity between character and costume flashed upon her and she laughed in spite of herself, but gravity descended swiftly once more. Without conceit she knew that he would seek her out again.

How long would she have to keep up the wretched farce before she learned the truth?

"Miss Jane! Oh, Miss Jane!" a hearty voice hailed her from across the street, and she looked up to see Ma Heaney standing on the steps of her lodging house with Ronald beside her smirking triumphantly. "Come over here for a minute, dearie."

"I—I have to get home for dinner." Jane paused irresolutely. It was evident that Ronald had wasted no time, but perhaps it would be just as well. The quicker their acquaintanceship ripened the better for her plan.

She crossed the street with evident reluctance.

"Dearie, shake hands with Mr. Winfield. He's been askin' about you, and I told him he wouldn't find a nicer little lady in his own home town than Miss Jane Peddar!" Ma Heaney performed the social rite with aplomb. "I was just directin' him to the barber's but I guess you can show him, bein' as it's on your way home."

"How do you do, Miss Peddar." Ronald spoke with mock ceremony as he held out a flabby hand. "I will be very much obliged if you will show me the way."

"I—I'll be very glad to," she murmured, conscious of Ma Heaney's astonished gaze at her unwontedly shy demeanor. "I'm late, though, and I must hurry back to the store. If you don't mind——"

"Certainly. I'll get my umbrella."

He turned back into the house and Ma Heaney announced in a stage whisper:

"He's a real swell, Miss Jane. You can tell that by his clothes even if they do look kind o' funny up here, and ain't he got the grandest manner? He asked me

who the pretty girl in the company store was and he seemed real taken with you."

"What is he in Katalak for?" Jane ignored the compliment. "He's not going prospecting up North in those clothes, is he?"

"I expect he's just tourin' around," Ma Heaney responded. "I declare it's a long time since a real gentleman like him came to this town. I hope you and him'll be good friends."

Ronald reappeared at this juncture and as they set forth he raised his umbrella.

"Don't hold it over me, Mr. Winfield," Jane protested. "I'm used to the rain and I like it; it can't hurt my clothes."

"Does it rain all the time here?" he asked.

"Almost. Is this your first trip up?" Jane met his eyes with a bland stare.

"Yes." He lowered the umbrella and turned up the collar of his coat. "Aren't you glad you didn't bet with me? I told you I would find out who you were, and I haven't any intention of going near the barber shop. Filthy place! I passed it this morning."

"Oh," Jane paused, adding innocently, "then why did you come out in the rain if you didn't want to go there?"

"So that I could talk to you." He rose promptly to the bait. "It's devilish lonely up here, and the minute I saw you standing in the store doorway I made up my mind that I'd get to know you somehow. I think I arranged it rather neatly, what?"

"But you are a—a swell, Mrs. Heaney says." Jane looked down. "I—I guess I'm not in your class."

“You’re a very nice little girl.” He pressed her arm, and instinctively she shrank away. “I’m going to see a lot of you, if you’ll only be kind to me. A chap must have someone to play about with, you know, and——”

He broke off abruptly and halted. Jane glanced up in surprise and saw that he was staring in equal astonishment at a figure which was approaching them; the figure of Barney Hoyt.

“Well, of all the—Hello, Hoyt!”

The engineer flashed a quick glance at Jane, bowed coldly and passed by without stopping or seeming to see the half-outstretched hand of Ronald. The latter flushed darkly as it fell once more to his side.

“Do you know Mr. Hoyt?” Jane asked as though she had noted no significance in their meeting.

“Know him?” Ronald echoed. “He was in my class at college, worked his way through the last two years. I don’t wonder he doesn’t care to remember me!”

He laughed sneeringly.

“Why? Did he fail?”

“No, but I don’t believe he’s any too anxious to recall those days.” The ugly note in his voice made Jane’s blood boil, but she controlled herself. “I wonder what he is doing up here?”

“Why, he is the construction engineer for the road the company I work for is building,” Jane replied.

“He is? J. Barnaby Hoyt, Junior, digging ditches in sackcloth and ashes, eh? By Gad, that’s rich!” he chuckled, and the girl beside him felt a sudden, savage impulse to strike the sound from his lips. “And he’s working for the Northern Star? What a joke!”

J. Barnaby Hoyt! What was it that the name recalled

vaguely to her mind? It was familiar, not as that of anyone whom she had known but she must have heard it talked about. The thought eluded her and although she hated herself for discussing the young engineer with the cad beside her whom he had so obviously cut, she felt that she must know.

“Why did he work his way through the last two years at college? Did he lose his money?”

“His father did. I don’t know where you come from and I don’t suppose you ever heard of him, but the old man was a big broker; Wall Street, if that means anything to you. He failed after trying to buck up against my—well, some friends of mine; failed for every dollar he owned and a lot that belonged to other people, I’ve heard. J. Barnaby, Junior,—this fellow here—didn’t have the grace to disappear. He stuck it out and brazened his way through the rest of his course at college, even after his father killed himself. Say, what’s the matter?”

For Jane had stopped abruptly and held out her hand. She was smiling steadily, but there was an odd glint in her eyes.

“My road turns off here, and I couldn’t let you see me home, Mr. Winfield. You’ve only just come, and father wouldn’t understand; he’s very strict.”

“You’ll be at the store later?” He tried to hold her hand, but she drew it away.

“Yes, but you mustn’t come there, you know. It is only for employees of the company, and strangers aren’t allowed.” Her voice trembled slightly. “Thank you for walking so far with me.”

“But you’ll meet me somewhere?” Ronald urged.

"Perhaps, sometime." Jane forced herself to glance back at him over her shoulder as she moved off alone along the walk. "Katalak isn't such a very big place, Mr. Winfield!"

She was aware that he stood still watching her and she felt an impulse to run from his detestable presence. She remembered now. The failure and suicide had been a nine-days' sensation when she was a very young girl, and she had often heard Uncle Andy and her grandfather mention it. She knew now also the secret of that strange, embittered streak in the young engineer's nature which had seemed so foreign to it, and her heart overflowed with sympathy for him, even as her admiration rose. He had not run away! He had stayed and finished his work at college, and if the rest of his classmates were of Ronald's caliber, she could imagine the torture he must have undergone! Poor Barney Hoyt!

Then another, more immediate recollection came to Jane; that look he had flashed upon her when he passed her in Ronald's company, and a sense of guilt burned within her. What must he think? What would he think in the future when he saw her accepting the attention of the man he evidently hated? A little shiver swept over her, but she forced the question back. Whatever he thought, however he judged her, she must play the game, as he himself had done when everything was against him. For Ollie's sake more than her own, for the sake of the fight they were all making she must know if Gordon Winfield was the owner of the Unatika mine!

CHAPTER XIV.

REDDENED SKIES

DURING the days that followed Jane saw little of "Barney" Hoyt. He did not come near the store, but she caught occasional glimpses of him on the way to and from the grassy plain where the rails were creeping out in an ever-lengthening double line to the foothills beyond. The girl wondered anew when he slept, for he seemed to be tirelessly on the job day and night, and her heart ached with the longing to say a word of comfort to him for the wretched past which had so saddened and embittered him, even though she realized with what surprise and resentment he would receive such an overture on her part.

He was avoiding her, of course, because she was evincing so lively an interest in the newcomer, the man whom she knew he must regard with contempt and loathing as an utter cad, and his attitude showed plainly enough what he thought of her.

Others, too, noted her growing friendship with Ronald and it was hard indeed for her to meet the disapproving, almost reproachful gaze of Jud Pittinger, and the changed bearing of the men themselves toward her. By her association with a man whom they considered a rank outsider of a particularly objectionable sort she had alienated herself from their kind and the chasm

between her and themselves which she had bridged with such painstaking effort during the first weeks was widening again imperceptibly but surely.

However, she was as surely making headway with Ronald. Jane tried to gain what comfort she could from that knowledge. Every waking moment which found her freed from her duties at the store brought him to her side, and soon not only the Northern Star outfit but the townsfolk of Katalak as well were watching the affair with interest.

Peddar was the most bewildered of all. Ordered to be especially gracious to the young man, he was at the same time warned so impressively to guard his tongue, and threatened with such dire results if he did not, that he did not know whether to be pleased or dismayed at the advent of this new factor in a situation already complicated enough to try his soul. Young Mr. Winfield was evidently a gentleman of their own sort and from their own world, and it was natural, he told himself, that his mistress should like the society of the kind of person to whom she was accustomed, but she seemed to be losing all interest in the progress of the railroad and the whole outfit. She could find plenty of young gentlemen like Mr. Winfield at home; had they come all this weary way and endured such hardships for her to relinquish her purpose for a mere flirtation?

He felt older by twenty years than when they had left New York; older and unable to cope with the situation. It was one thing to act as guardian for Miss Janey on this wild mission which she had undertaken, but quite another to chaperone her during a possible love affair. He dared not approach her directly on the

subject, but when Big Jim Bowers, the superintendent, dropped in one evening for a smoke with him, he attempted as cautiously as his guileless nature would allow to sound him on the matter.

"We don't see much of young Mr. Hoyt any more," he ventured as an opening wedge.

"Guess not. He's right busy, I reckon," Big Jim responded laconically.

"He used to find time to get around now and then."

"Before this city fellow came up." The superintendent spoke dryly. "I don't think he cares much for that kind."

"I—I'm quite sure Mr. Winfield is a perfect gentleman," Peddar quavered, shocked at the implied disparagement of the representative of a class before which he bowed.

"Do you know what he is up here for? Does anybody?" Big Jim knocked the ashes from his pipe and reached for his tobacco sack.

"Janey says he is just traveling around to see this part of the country," Peddar replied somewhat doubtfully.

"Then why don't he travel?" demanded the other. "He's been here more than a fortnight now and no signs of taking himself off. I've caught him snooping around our works more than once and he is forever disappearing into the foothills on that horse he bought from Lew Nagle, and always going in one direction, too; toward the Unatika outfit. I'm not quite sure of that young man."

"How is Janey getting on at the store?" Peddar asked suddenly.

"All right." Big Jim's loquacity seemed as suddenly

stemmed. "Guess she's there whenever Jud Pittinger needs her."

The insinuation was not lost upon his host.

"Do you mean that she isn't there as much as she used to be?" Peddar's tone was filled with unconcealed anxiety. "She—she's spending too much time with Mr. Winfield?"

"Well, you're her boss," Big Jim responded slowly.

"I only wish I was!" The anxiety changed to bitterness as Peddar recalled the past weeks of tribulation now seemingly gone for naught. "When she was a little thing I could manage her in a way of speaking, but she was always a handful! Now nobody, not even——"

He caught himself up with belated caution, but Big Jim nodded understandingly.

"Guess girls mostly are," he remarked sagely. "Of course, she's naturally kind of flattered that a swell like this Winfield should take notice of her, but a fellow of his sort don't mean anything serious with a girl who works in a company store. I thought Miss Jane was more level headed than to let it get turned, but she's young yet. If you ask me, Mr. Peddar, I'd keep my eye on her."

"*Flattered?* Her!" Peddar choked. "There—there's nothing in Mr. Winfield's attentions that could flatter M—my daughter!"

"Right you are!" Big Jim agreed, misreading the other's indignation. "She is too fine a girl to waste her time with a fellow who is only fooling around and amusing himself. Why don't you kind of talk to her?"

"It wouldn't be any use," Peddar retorted gloomily,

"I've tried but she just says that she knows what she is doing, and there you are. Now, if you was to tell her that she ought to stay around the store more, maybe she would listen."

"I'm no hand at that kind of thing!" Big Jim protested in some alarm.

"Still, she's working for you, isn't she?" Peddar insisted. "You might hint to Mr. Pittinger that I would like to have her kept to the work she came up here to do. I'm sure I wish that we had never come, I do, indeed!"

At that precise moment Jane, mounted on a bony, spavined horse that she would have disdained at home, was cantering slowly through the grove of cottonwood trees which lined the river valley three miles above where it emptied into Katalak Bay, and Ronald was beside her.

She was in a mood bordering on exasperation for although there was no question of Ronald's subjugation, she seemed not a whit nearer gaining his confidence than when he had come. Again and again she had led as adroitly as she could up to the subject of the mines, but he showed no interest in either of them, and when she questioned his reason for remaining so long in Katalak his reply was invariably in the form of an insolently fulsome compliment.

It had been as much as she could do to keep him from making open love to her, and she told herself fiercely that not for a hundred mines could she endure that! Still, he could not be held off forever, and the thought of possible failure was maddening.

They emerged upon the mossy plain and slowed to a

walk to pick their way between the tufts of stunted grasses, and Jane's eyes turned eagerly toward the railroad.

"We are getting on to the glacier bed, aren't we?" she cried exultantly, forgetful of the need of caution in her joy at sight of the progress which had been made since last she had passed that way.

"Are you so much interested in the work of the Northern Star Company, Jane?" Ronald pressed his mount close to hers. "They don't regard you as anything more than an insignificant cog in their machine, you know. Why should you care?"

"Well, I'm working for them," Jane responded half-apologetically. "Mr. Hoyt showed me the start of the work and it was really interesting although I didn't understand a thing about it, of course. Mr. Hoyt tried to explain——"

"Look here!" he interrupted. "Wasn't it Hoyt and not the road that was interesting? Were you playing about with him before I came?"

Jane lowered her eyes to keep him from seeing the sudden fire of indignation which glowed in them.

"What if I was?" she asked with a poor attempt at coquetry, but Ronald was not in a mood to be critical.

He laughed that short, ugly laugh of his.

"It's a good thing for you that I appeared on the scene before you lost your heart to him, little one," he remarked complacently. "I told you a few things about him that first day, but there's something you don't know. You wouldn't have stood a chance with him, my dear; he was stung once, and he'll never look at another girl again as long as he lives."

Jane's heart leaped and then seemed to stop dead in her breast. So there was another girl after all! It had been something more than the tragedy and disgrace of the past which had brought that embittered look to his face!

"Oh, I suppose people all have love affairs that they think they will never get over." Could that be her own voice speaking with such casual carelessness?

"Not Hoyt. He was hit so hard that he won't forget it," Ronald chuckled. "It was my own cousin, too. She is two or three years older than he, but a stunner, if a chap likes the dark, imperious kind. They were engaged and she liked him well enough to marry him, I fancy, before the smash came; you see, she hasn't a penny of her own and old Hoyt was reputed to be worth millions. When he failed and killed himself, J. Barnaby, Junior, had the nerve to expect her to wait for him; wait until he had finished college, and then marry him and go away to some hole like this while he dug ditches and laid rails! If you had ever seen my cousin Grace you would realize what chance there was of her looking forward to such a future! She told him where he got off without mincing matters, and it was a facer for him, I can tell you! Shouldn't be surprised if he cared for her even now."

Jane had tried to interrupt him, to silence that sneering, heartless voice that was laying bare another man's soul, but no sound came from her lips. She was scarcely conscious of having taken in half that he had said; the fact that there had been another girl had overshadowed his statement that it was his cousin and not until he

mentioned the name "Grace" did it have any significance for her.

So it had been Grace Winfield, Adele Everton's friend whom she was even now chaperoning! She had meant to marry him for his money, and threw him over when that dream was dispelled! Jane felt a rising rage and contempt against this girl whom she had never seen which surpassed even her secret antagonism to the man beside her. What a wicked, heartless, abominable creature!

She was aware that Ronald had turned in his saddle and was regarding her curiously and she shrugged.

"Maybe he does care for her still; what is it to me?" she asked. "I had plenty of fellows before we came up here."

"You've got me, now," Ronald announced in a quick undertone. "Gad, but I should say you *have* got me! I never thought I should fall so hard, but you're different to any of the rest of them. I'd swear you were leading me on, you little witch, only you never let me even hold your hand! I can't make out what kind of a girl you are!"

"Well, I don't know anything about you, you know." She laughed back at him, but her heart was like lead within her. "I never met anyone like you, either. I just know your name and that you come from New York."

"I fancy my name would be enough if you had ever known many people back in the East; that is, people who—er——"

"In society, you mean?" Jane queried demurely.

"What chance have I ever had to meet them until you came? You'll be going away soon——"

"I'll stay as long as you are here." He leaned so near that his breath fanned her cheek. "Don't you know, Jane, that I'm mad about you? Won't you be a little kind to me?"

"I think I am, spending time with you when I ought to be at work in the store, and neglecting father and the house," she retorted, adding quickly: "Let's swing around and come in the upper end of Main Street."

They had reached the outskirts of Katalak, and Jane was spared any further demonstration on the part of her companion. When she dismounted Peddar was waiting anxiously at the open door of the shack, and there was opportunity only for a formal good-night, for which she was profoundly thankful. Her head ached throbbingly and every nerve in her body seemed on edge.

"Oh, for goodness sake, let me alone!" she cried impatiently, in response to Peddar's admonition to come in out of the dampness. "I don't mean to be cross, but you are so *stupid* sometimes, Peddar! Do go to bed; I want to stay out here on the porch awhile and think."

Peddar sighed reproachfully and closed the door, and Jane sank down on the lowest step, elbows resting on knees and her small chin cupped in her hands.

Grace Winfield had never married; she had lived abroad for years and then in Baltimore. Evidently she had not succeeded yet in ensnaring a rich man as she had supposed Barney Hoyt to be. How could he ever have been taken in by a designing thing like that? He seemed so clear-eyed, so sure of himself! But she was a stunner, Ronald had said, of the dark, imperious kind.

Jane tossed her own red-gold head. Older than Barney Hoyt, too, and he was only a boy then in college. But sometimes those early affairs lasted all one's life; perhaps he was in love with her still, would always love her.

All at once that moment in the store on the day of Ronald's first appearance in Katalak returned to Jane's mind, when Barney Hoyt had told her that he had neither family nor friends and there was "no one to care." Had he been thinking at that very minute of the girl who had cast him aside when trouble and disgrace that was none of his doing came to him? He didn't look like the sort of man who would forget, ever. What a hideous muddle the world was!

Jane did not realize how long she sat there until the gray gloom slowly darkened to the dusky twilight which meant that their two short hours of night were at hand. One o'clock! Peddar must long since have been asleep, or he would have reappeared and besought her to come in.

She rose stiffly and turned to enter the shack, when the sound of footsteps on the plank walk made her pause. Who could be coming that way at such an hour? A swift fear that it might be Malison returned for vengeance clutched at her heart, and she waited with her hand on the doorknob, ready to spring within and draw the bolts if it were.

Then she remembered her whistle, and was just reaching for it, when two figures advanced toward her out of the dusk, and to her astonishment she recognized Big Jim Bowers and Barney Hoyt.

They were talking together in low but excited tones

and she caught the words: "Knifed in the back, too, poor devil! . . . Thought that scoundrel Malison had been quiet too long. . . . Case for a deputy marshal."

"Oh, what is it?" Jane cried, advancing to the steps.

"You up still, Miss Jane?" It was the superintendent who replied to her. Hoyt glanced away. "Sorry to have to disturb your father at this hour, but we have a message for you."

"For me?" faltered Jane. "From whom?"

"From the man you befriended; Pietro. It was too serious a matter to wait till morning."

"Come in." She turned and opening the door led the way into the shack. "Will it be necessary to awaken father? I don't like to alarm him——"

"No." Hoyt spoke for the first time. "Miss Peddar, I am afraid our news will be something of a shock to you, but we dare not waste a moment's time in trying to prepare you for it. Pietro is dead. He was found just now lying close to the rails a quarter of a mile up our line, stabbed in the back. When the body was searched this envelope addressed to you was discovered in one of his pockets."

He held out the missive as he spoke, but Jane did not seem to see it. Her eyes had blurred with tears, the first she had shed since coming to Katalak, and she cried brokenly:

"Dead! Poor Pietro! And the baby! The little baby he had never seen!"

"Miss Peddar, will you please read this at once or give me leave to do so." Hoyt's tone was cutting, dominant in its command, and there was a harsh, unfeeling quality in it that she had never heard before.

Big Jim seemed not unaware of it, for he supplemented:

"You see, Miss Jane, we think it may be a warning of danger to you, and we believe he may have been followed and killed to prevent his telling you. He probably anticipated that, and planned for the note to reach you if he couldn't."

Brushing away her tears Jane took the grimy, crumpled envelope from the engineer's hand, as if in a daze, and tore it open.

One startled glance at its contents and the mist cleared from before her eyes.

"Good Heavens! Listen! 'Gracious Signorina. No go store to-night. Death!' signed 'Pietro!' What can it mean?" She raised horrified eyes to the two men. "Surely Malison would not dare attempt murder just because I——"

"Pietro was murdered," Hoyt interrupted grimly. "What do you make of it, Jim?"

"I'm going down to the store and see," the superintendent announced. "Pietro has been dead for some hours; it may be that they meant to waylay Miss Jane as she went back to her work early this evening, but it don't seem likely that they would try it in daylight. I think they mean mischief down at the store, but there's time yet to stop it."

He turned to the door and Hoyt called after him:

"Send a couple of the boys up here at once. I'll wait until they come."

Jane ventured a timidly grateful glance at him, but he had not looked directly at her since he came and she

stiffened. He was only doing his duty. Why should she humble herself to thank him?

A wild yell from Big Jim made them both wheel about in alarm. He had stepped out upon the porch, and stood looking toward Main Street and the harbor, his mighty figure outlined in a lurid red haze.

“My God! They’ve fired the storehouse!”

CHAPTER XV.

THE MESSAGE

JANE and Hoyt sprang through the doorway. The red rain drops fell slowly like dripping blood, and reddened, too, was the arch of the sky. At the harbor's edge a huge crimson flare shot up, mingled with the sharp writhing tongues of flame, and bathed the whole town and the bay in its vivid, sinister light.

Peddar's startled, quavering tones sounded from behind them, but Jane did not hear.

"Jud Pittinger!" she gasped. "He'll never leave while a bit of the stock is left in the store, and they may have planted dynamite again!"

"Stay here!" Hoyt ordered as he and Big Jim leaped down the steps. "I'll send someone back to guard you——"

"It's my store!" Jane flamed back at him and would have started after, but Peddar appeared and seized her arm.

"You'll do as Mr. Hoyt says, miss!" he declared with amazing firmness. "Whatever happens to the store or anyone in it, you'll not go down there this night to be killed! I've charge of you and it's my duty——"

"Let me go!" Jane tore herself from his grasp, and dashing down the steps started off hatless and coatless through the rain.

It seemed miles to Main Street. The wet planks were slippery and treacherous under foot and the clinging mud seemed to suck her down with each step, but she ran doggedly on, her eyes fixed upon that lurid glow ahead.

Subdued shouting came to her ears and the rushing clatter of feet, and as she turned the corner of Main Street at last Jane paused, appalled yet fascinated by the scene before her.

The company warehouse, in one side of which the store was situated, had become a roaring furnace from which flames leaped high and great clouds of turgid smoke billowed forth to hang low in a dense, smothering blanket over the town. The men of the company augmented as it seemed by everyone in town were drawn up in a circle about the burning building as near as they dared approach, and the emergency fire apparatus sent feeble, pitifully inadequate streams of water into the holocaust only to have them turn to a hissing spray of steam.

At that distance Jane's eyes were smarting, and a sharp pain darted through her lungs. She turned up the sodden woolen collar of her sweater and pressing it across her mouth and nose, started down the street, but as she passed the lodging house Ma Heaney hailed her.

"Miss Jane! What in the world are you doing here? Dearie, there ain't a mite o' use your goin' any further, you couldn't get near the store anyway; it's gone!"

Jane looked up. Ma Heaney was seated on the top step philosophically regarding the conflagration, and beside her lounged Ronald. He was watching the scene absorbedly, and in the red glare it seemed to Jane that he was smiling.

"Jud Pittinger! Is he safe?"

At the sound of Jane's cry Ronald turned quickly and sprang to his feet.

"Miss Peddar! Come up here and sit with us if you can stand the smoke. I had no idea that you would come out at this hour or I would have gone to your home for you. You really must not go any nearer the blaze; it's not safe!"

Jane paused irresolutely, but the crowd and the smoke which eddied up the street warned her that it would be impossible to approach the burning building and reluctantly she mounted the steps and seated herself beside them.

"The wind is from the north, what there is of it, thank the Lord!" Ma Heaney observed. "If 'tweren't, likely the whole place would go. I've seen it start this way in a boom town in Nevada, and when it died out there wasn't so much as a wall standin'."

"But is there really no danger that some of the other houses may catch fire?" Jane asked nervously. "The smoke seems to be rolling up this way."

"I guess not," replied Ma Heaney. "It's been rainin' pretty steady, you know, and they're all well soaked. I ain't worryin' none, myself. Nothing's likely to catch of its own accord."

Jane glanced sharply at her.

"You mean that the store was set on fire?" she asked in a lowered tone. Could it be that other warning had reached the town beside that poor pitiful little note of Pietro's?

Ma Heaney shrugged her ample shoulders.

"Don't you smell something else on the air besides

the smoke?" she demanded. "Somethin' queer, like a hospital smell?"

"Heavens, Mrs. Heaney!" Ronald turned quickly to her. "How could anyone possibly get a whiff of anything else? I suppose they have medical supplies and disinfectants stored in the warehouse, along with all the rest of the stuff, but you couldn't detect the odor of any one thing burning."

"Don't talk to me, young man!" retorted Ma Heaney. "You see those green and yellow and blue flames mixed with the red ones, when the fire creeps to a fresh spot low down on the wall near the ground? That's creosote burning—creosote that's been put there to help the blaze along. That there fire's been set, as sure as you're alive!"

"But who would do it?" There was amused incredulity in Ronald's tone, and Jane watched his face with steady eyes. "Surely the Northern Star is not so hard up that they have more need of their insurance money than their materials and supplies?"

Jane caught her breath indignantly, but checked the hasty words which rose to her lips at his cool insolence.

"No, I reckon the Northern Star ain't exactly hard up, but there's them that would like to see them so," Ma Heaney replied dryly. "You're a stranger here, Mr. Winfield, but there's been a lot o' crooked work goin' on, and we've all got a pretty clear notion o' who's at the bottom of it. Those of us who like fair play are kind o' bettin' on the Northern Star."

Jane could have hugged her, but instead she asked once more:

"Have you seen Mr. Pittinger? Doesn't anybody know whether he is safe or not?"

"Don't you worry about him, dearie." Ma Heaney pressed her hand. "Before you showed up I seen him workin' like blazes with the other men, getting what part of his stock out that he could, and when the store got too hot for him he went to help save some of the materials from the warehouse. The last I saw of him, he was dancin' around a bunch o' dagos, drivin' them to work faster. *Jud's* all right."

"Was—was anybody hurt, do you know?" Jane felt that there was a mental reservation in the older woman's emphasis of the storekeeper's name, and a swift fear made her whole body tense.

"Well, they do say that when the back wall o' the store fell somebody got caught underneath it. One o' the boys hollered it to me from across the street, but maybe it ain't so."

"Did he say who it was?" Jane cried in an agony of anxiety. "Ma Heaney, I've just *got* to know!"

"It wasn't Hoyt, at any rate!" Ronald turned to her with a sudden sneer which curled back his lips from his teeth. "He and the superintendent arrived on the scene late enough to be perfectly safe!"

Jane ignored the slur.

"I was thinking of the others," she dissembled.

"They're all friends of mine, you know. Oh, there's Mr. Dugdale! I'll ask him!"

She jumped to her feet and darted down the steps and across the street in vast relief, fearful that if she stayed a moment longer in Ronald's presence she would be unable to contain herself.

Harve Dugdale saw her coming and paused in surprise.

"Holy mackerel, Miss Jane, I thought you was home and asleep!" he exclaimed. "There's nothin' more to be done but to let her burn out, and see that no other shack don't catch."

"Who was hurt?" she demanded breathlessly. "Ma Heaney said that someone was caught under a falling wall!"

Harve grinned sheepishly.

"Nobody but me, I guess, and I ain't hurt a mite, only singed some. The boys pulled me out."

Jane looked quickly up and saw that where the rivulets of sweat had washed the soot from his face his leathery skin was strangely pale and his heavy brows and the hair above them were gone.

"Oh, are you sure you are not burned, not in pain?" she asked pityingly.

"Not a mite!" he responded cheerfully. "I'm goin' to see you home if you'll let me, Miss Jane. I don't guess your Pa would want you to be around town alone this time o' night, and there ain't a thing you can do."

Jane suffered herself to be convoyed home, but after she had quieted Peddar's fears and lain down upon her bed sleep was long in coming to her. The tragedy of Pietro's death in her service, even more than the disaster to the warehouse and store weighed upon her spirits, although it might be that the latter would retard the road building for many precious, vital weeks to come. If only she might have seen Barney Hoyt again, even for a moment down there!

But what word of comfort could she have offered him in this hour of his greatest trial? The old camaraderie

between them was gone forever, the budding friendship killed by the blight of Ronald's presence, and in her own heart she felt a certain constraint towards the young engineer. He was in love with Grace Winfield, and nursing that love in spite of its futility. If she went out of her way to try to comfort him in this disaster he might think that she, the assistant storekeeper, was smitten with him!

Jane buried her face in the thin pillow in shame at the thought. Why should she care how he felt now in this trouble? He had fought his way alone through the world for eight years, and he was in no need of friendship and its consolations. She must put him from her thoughts, for there was work still for her to do, rendered even more vital by the night's event.

Had that really been a triumphant smile on Ronald's countenance as he watched the destruction of the warehouse and store, or was it merely a figment of her imagination, a distortion seen through the smoke? His slurs at the Northern Star outfit could be accounted for easily enough in view of the fact that his father was their enemy, but had he a guilty knowledge beforehand that the fire was to take place?

The next morning early found Jane at the scene of the ruins. Huge, blackened heaps of debris which still smoldered and smoked viciously were all that was left of the building, and her heart sank within her. The men could get along somehow without their stores until a steamer could bring a fresh supply, but what of the kegs of spikes and bolts and the rest of the material without which the road could not go on? Were they to be defeated now when a bare fortnight or so would have

brought the road up to the glacier bed which Barney Hoyt had said was the crucial spot?

While she stood forlornly contemplating the ruined mass, Jud Pittinger appeared across the street and waddled quickly over to her.

"I guess you're out of a job, Miss Jane." He tried to smile, but his fat face was drawn and twisted, and his mild eyes flashed.

"They did it, the Unatika!" Jane exclaimed. "You have heard about the note poor Pietro tried to bring to me when they killed him?"

Jud nodded.

"If I was a swearin' man, Miss Jane, I could maybe tell you a little of how I feel!" he confided. "I managed to save the company books and most of the tobacco, but all that was left of that new-fangled stock has gone with the rest of the supplies. And the worst of it is, nobody knows how they did it, consarn them! I was waitin' on two or three of the clearin' gang that had got off the three o'clock shift and had been sweepin' up since, when all at once the whole outside of the store seemed to bu'st into flame! Seemed like there was a lot of little explosions, too. It was creosote all right, mixed with kerosene and a little powder here and there. I'm a God-fearin' man, Miss Jane, but I certainly would like to get my hands on them that did it, just once!"

"If you saved the tobacco, can't we open up a little stall somewhere and sell it to the men, Mr. Pittinger?" Jane asked suddenly. "Wouldn't it rather counteract the discouragement they must feel in their work if they could realize that we weren't quite wiped out?"

"Well, I swan!" Jud gazed at her admiringly. "What

do you know about your thinkin' of what Mr. Hoyt calls their morale, too! We're going to do just that. Big Jim says he'll knock up a shack in the next couple of days here, and you and me will be doin' business right at the old stand. But meantime there ain't a thing you can do around here, Miss Jane, and your young man is waitin' on Ma Heaney's steps for you——"

"If you mean Mr. Winfield, he's not my young man!" Jane retorted hotly. "I wouldn't have him if he were the last one on earth!"

"I'm certainly glad to hear it!" Jud said in a relieved fashion. "That spindle-shanked dude ain't your style, Miss Jane, if you'll excuse me for sayin' so. It beats all, though, how you girls can fritter your time away!"

Jane laughed at him.

"You let me know when you are ready to open up shop and I'll be on hand!" she announced. "Don't you worry about me, Mr. Pittinger!"

But her spirits sank as she turned and started back up the street once more. She was in no mood to encounter Ronald just then, yet it seemed inevitable, for at her approach he crossed and stood waiting for her.

"Good-morning!" he said gayly. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, isn't it? Since the store exists no longer, you will have an indefinite sort of holiday, won't you?"

A swift inspiration came to Jane and summoning all her determination, she smiled.

"Not for long, I am afraid, for they saved some of their stock and they are going to put up a temporary shack, but I'll have a few days, anyway! You don't

know how glad I am to get away from behind that old counter!"

"I should think so, a girl like you!" Ronald fell into step beside her. "Why do you stay here, anyway? It is no place for you, and I don't believe the Northern Star people will ever complete that road."

"Why not?" Jane's heart was beating fast. "They are a big company, aren't they?"

"Don't you know?" He replied to her question with another. "Don't you even know who you are working for?"

"Just that it's the Northern Star," Jane responded innocently. "I suppose it is some big combination back East."

Ronald laughed.

"It's only a couple of kids—the last of a family that went to the wall two years ago," he informed her. "They bought in the Northern Star mine on a shoe-string, and they haven't enough to finance it or even finish the road, now that their materials are gone. If you stick you will be out of a job in a few weeks anyway, and I wish you would come back to the States. I'll find something more suitable for you to do, with a bigger salary and then, too, I can see you sometimes. What is the good of waiting until the crash comes?"

"How do you know all this?" Jane asked in a curiously repressed voice.

"Oh, I've been talking to the Unatika people; the outfit working for the other company, you know," replied Ronald, carelessly. "They say yours hasn't a chance. Besides, one of their men was killed last night by a Northern Star gang and they are out for blood; they've

sent for the marshal from Juneau, and when he starts an inquiry, I fancy your people will lie down and take their medicine. Say, where are we going?"

They had passed the end of Main Street and while he talked Jane had led him out along the old sledge track which wound away to the north over the tundra. No habitations lay before them, but just a little way beyond was a secluded group of cottonwood trees which she had investigated once on a solitary ramble. The conversation had started propitiously. Ronald was in a confidential mood, and if she could lead him on to divulge the knowledge which she sought, this wretched farce might end once and for all.

"I'd love to take a good walk, wouldn't you?" She looked smilingly into his eyes. "It hasn't rained to-day and I think the sun is trying to come out. There is the darlingest little brook up there among the cottonwood trees——"

"Oh, all right," Ronald agreed. "I'm not crazy about this mud but I'll go anywhere with you, Jane. I was afraid I had offended you last night, when I tried to tease you about Hoyt. Of course, I know you don't really care anything about him."

"I should think not!" Jane tossed her head. "I didn't like your knocking the outfit, but I thought a great big company was back of us. Father and I would not have come all this way if we had known it was only just somebody who was likely to fail any time and leave us stranded. I believe I will speak to him about going home, but Brooklyn is a long way off——"

"So you live in Brooklyn! You never would tell me before!" Ronald cried triumphantly. "I'll be home my-

self in the early autumn and we can see each other a lot if only you won't stick up here. I'll take you to places in town you've never seen, and we'll have some wonderful times! Say that you will come back, Jane! I can do a lot for you and I will, if you are only nice to me."

"But I cannot leave unless I'm perfectly sure that the Northern Star is going to fail," Jane objected. "I—I'd love to be back in the East and have some good times with you! It would be wonderful! I never had a chance before. Would you take me to a theater on Broadway and one of those great big restaurants where all the rich people go?"

She was afraid that she was overdoing it, but Ronald smirked fatuously.

"Take you anywhere your little heart desires!" he promised. "I'm crazy about you, dear, I tell you! It will be like heaven after this mud and squalor! I will give you a letter to a friend of mine who will place you in a much better position right away. Get your father to leave with you on the next steamer and I'll go with you as far as Ladysmith. Will you, Jane?"

"But the company," Jane faltered. "Suppose it weren't true? These Unatika people may have been lying to you. Why should they tell all that to you, a stranger?"

"Oh, they know who I am, all right," Ronald said loftily.

Jane shook her head.

"I couldn't think of dragging father all the way back so soon after we came unless I had better proof than that. Of course, I don't doubt your word," she added

hastily, "but we don't trust the Unatika people, you know."

"Not the employees, maybe." Ronald paused and then went on impetuously. "I understand there has been bad blood between them and the Northern Star outfit, but if you won't say anything about it, I will tell you something you will believe. My father owns the Unatika mine."

Jane drew a deep breath. So her suspicions had been right after all and they were indeed in the hands of the enemy!

"You don't mean he owns it now, do you? Perhaps he is going to buy it, and that's why you came up here?" She must be sure!

"He developed it from the beginning; as soon as he learned about the Northern Star he sent a man up here who discovered the Unatika right beside it and Dad bought it in. Now will you believe me when I tell you that the other outfit are bound to fail?"

They had reached the clump of cottonwoods and Jane advanced beneath them and then drew back.

"Oh, dear! We can't go on! It's too wet and the trees are dripping! Of course I believe you, and I—I'll speak to father the minute I get home. I won't tell him what you have told me, but just that I'm tired of it up here, and I'll try to persuade him to go back East."

"Wait!" Ronald tried to draw her back beneath the dripping shelter of the cottonwoods once more, but she laughingly eluded him, and if there was a feverish quality in her gayety, he was too infatuated to observe it.

"We must go back or I don't know what father will

say, and we don't want him to be angry now," she said. "He knows I haven't any work at the store, when there isn't any store to work in! Will you take me for a ride this afternoon?"

An hour later Jane, breathless and disheveled of hair, confronted Big Jim Bowers at the door of the general office.

"Mr. Bowers, I want you to do something for me and—and ask no questions." She was very pale and there was a curious gleam in her eyes. "There is something that Mr. MacLeod must know immediately; it is of the utmost importance to the Northern Star Company, and the mails are too slow. Mr. MacLeod said that if ever I required any special service of you I was to give you this."

She held out an envelope, and the amazed superintendent took it and broke the seal.

"Dear Mr. Bowers:" he read, in Adam MacLeod's small precise hand. "Give the young lady who presents this to you any assistance that lies in your power and discuss it with no one. She has the fullest confidence of the company, and is on a special, private mission."

"I might have known, Miss," he said slowly as he looked up at her once more. "I'm to say nothing to Mr. Hoyt?"

"Not unless I give you leave, Mr. Bowers. I want your most trustworthy man to go immediately by the fastest route to the nearest wireless station, and relay a message to Mr. MacLeod."

"That will be Juneau." Big Jim seemed still dazed by the revelation which had been made to him. "I'll send Harve Dugdale, if he will suit you, Miss."

"He will do splendidly, if he has quite recovered from last night," she replied. "You must give some excuse to Mr. Hoyt; tell him that the Unatika people have sent for a marshal from Juneau and mean to accuse some of our men of poor Pietro's murder. It's true, too. Say that you're sending a message to the marshal yourself. And please don't call 'Miss' like that; I'm still just Jane Peddar."

Big Jim held out his hand.

"Whoever you are, I—I want to shake hands with you," he said somewhat unsteadily. "I am at your service always—Miss Jane!"

In half an hour Harve Dugdale was floundering through the mud toward Juneau in a crazy jitney impounded from the proprietor of the Full Blast and the message he bore read:

"Winfield owns Unatika. Warn Geddes. Janey."

CHAPTER XVI

THE COMING OF THE "GREY GULL"

RONALD waited in vain that afternoon for the capricious Jane to appear and finally mounted his own horse and rode off in high dudgeon. He would keep away from the little minx for a few days and teach her a lesson; she must learn that she could not play fast and loose with him as though he were a mere counter-jumper in her own class!

Meanwhile, Jane was curled up comfortably on the cot in the kitchen-living room of the shack, watching Ma Heaney at her self-imposed task of pie making. At the arrival of their visitor Peddar had hurriedly departed for the town, and the two women were alone.

"I tell you, if I was Mr. Hoyt I wouldn't wait for no more 'accidents' to happen. After that note that poor Pietro wrote to you, I'd just get a posse o' my own men together and sail right in and clean out the whole Unatika outfit!" Ma Heaney gesticulated expressively with her floury hands.

"If he did that they could appeal to the authorities at Juneau and put the Northern Star out of business," Jane smiled. "Mr. Hoyt can do the same thing, of course, when once he can catch any of them in the act, but unfortunately that note was too vague to serve as actual proof that the Unatika people set fire to the

warehouse and store last night, and no one saw them do it. Malison must be at the back of it, and I think someone else had a guilty knowledge that it was going to be done; it would surprise you very much if I could tell you who, Mrs. Heaney."

Ma Heaney stared.

"Nothin' would surprise me that any o' them pulled off," she remarked. "I've got them to thank for it that my house is all smoked out, the dirty rats! I'm lettin' it air now; thank the Lord the sun's out."

"You don't think Malison started the fire himself?" Jane asked.

"Not him! He won't have the nerve to show himself in Katalak again unless he had a gang o' his men with him. There's a lot o' scum in his outfit, though, that will do the dirty work for him if he pays them well enough, and I guess the Unatika people themselves have give him orders to drive the Northern Star out at all costs. Did you hear about Etta Carney?"

"The girl who was in love with Malison? No. What about her?" Jane glanced up in sudden interest.

"I told you she cut up somethin' terrible when he was run out of town." Ma Heaney lifted the pie plate on the tips of five pudgy fingers and cut the superfluous dough from its rim. "Well, she was always kind o' a nice little thing as them girls go; she worked as capper for Cliff Bishop over at the Full Blast——"

"What is 'capper?'" Jane interrupted.

"Cliff Bishop is the faro dealer," Ma Heaney explained. "Etta used to get talkin' to the strangers at the bar, and steer 'em over to the game and get her percentage if they lost."

"Goodness!" ejaculated Jane. "And you call her a 'nice little thing!'"

"Well, so she is. Her fall guys didn't always lose, by a long sight, for Cliff deals a straight game, and as far as any of 'em ever got with her was a drink and a smile. Then Malison came along and she fell in love with him, but I guess he got cold feet when she went around bragging to the other girls that they was goin' to be married. She just wouldn't give him up, though, and when the boys run him out she went all to pieces. She wasn't any too well before, what with this climate and all, and now she's took to her bed."

"Poor thing!" Jane cried softly. "Where does she live?"

"She shares a shack with Pearl Sparkes at the end of Harbor Street. Pearl dances at the Happy Days, you know." Ma Heaney added: "If she'd only get up enough spunk to go back to Frisco where she come from, the boys would pass the hat for her ticket, but her nerve's gone. I took her in some broth the other day, but she wouldn't even speak to me and just turned her face to the wall. You can't do 'nothin' with a girl like that."

Jane wondered if the last statement were true. Surely there must be some way of helping a girl like Etta Carney; a girl who could keep her self-respect, distorted as her conception of it might be, even in a gambling saloon. She tried to visualize what it must be like to be wretchedly unhappy, ill and destitute and alone in a strange land, and the mental picture made her shudder.

Peddar returned and they sat down to Ma Heaney's

bountiful supper, but Jane ate little, and she was unusually silent and thoughtful while she helped the older woman to clear away the dishes.

Ma Heaney departed to set her aired-out lodging house to rights, and Peddar was smoking peacefully on the porch enjoying the pale sunshine, when Jane made her appearance with a basket on her arm.

"I'm going down town for a little while," she announced. "Don't wait up for me if you want to go to bed."

"I'll go with you, miss——" Peddar half rose.

"No; I'm going alone." She spoke decidedly. "You needn't act like an old policeman, Peddar! I shan't get into any trouble."

"I'm not so sure." Peddar sighed heavily. "You're a changed young lady since we came up here, miss, if you don't mind my saying so, and I'm not at all sure that Mr. Geddes would approve of this Mr. Winfield."

"I'm quite sure he wouldn't!" Jane retorted with a little chuckle. "However, Peddar dear, I'm twenty-one, you know, and I can marry Jud Pittinger if I like!"

Peddar's groan followed her down the walk, but she paid no heed. The interview before her presented some unpleasant possibilities, yet she did not falter. Here was just another girl like herself, but a girl who needed care and a little friendliness. Jane knew that she would be the least welcome of perhaps anyone in Katalak, yet surely there must be some way in which she could overcome the other's sadly misplaced jealousy and antagonism.

She found the little habitation at the end of Harbor Street—a miserable, weather-beaten shack with its roof

partly caved in—and knocked at the door. There was no response although she tried again and again, and finally she turned the knob and entered.

A couch with a faded, once gay cover stood against the wall, a few chairs in various stages of dilapidation were scattered about and in the center of the room was a table with a filthy red cloth on which stood a half-empty whiskey bottle and a plate containing fragments of cold, greasy food. The walls were hung with cheap lithographs. Ashes and cigarette ends littered the floor and the rusty stove in the corner smoked dismally.

Jane shuddered as she glanced about her. The room was empty, but from a half-opened door adjoining there came a rustle as though something had moved within.

Summoning all her courage Jane stepped to the door. A chest of drawers with a cracked mirror first met her gaze, then a narrow cot with a chair beside it on which was a glass containing watered condensed milk and a saucer of limp crackers. On the cot lay a girl with dark, disheveled hair and eyes which burned into hers in half-incredulous surprise and resentment.

“G—good-evening,” Jane stammered, with a tremulous smile. “Ma Heaney told me that you were ill and I thought you might like something light and dainty to eat——”

The girl sat up suddenly and pointed with a thin out-flung arm to the door.

“You go!” Her voice was low and trembled with passion. “I don’t want anything you’ve got or anything to do with you! How dare you come here, *you* of all people?”

“Because,” Jane’s voice was steady now, and very

sweet, "because I think girls ought to be friendly and help each other when they're all alone in a place like this, don't you? I know you dislike me, and blame me for what happened to your friend but indeed, indeed it was not my fault! You don't believe me now, of course, but you don't even know me. Won't you wait until you do before you pass judgment? If the men can practice fair play——"

"Fair play!" Etta Carney repeated with a derisive laugh which ended in a sob. "*You* to talk of fair play! If you didn't want him yourself, why did you take him away from me?"

"I didn't, and he didn't want me, really." Jane suppressed a shudder. "It was just a—a new face, don't you see? I wasn't responsible for what the boys did. But don't let us talk about that. Won't you let me help you just as I would want you to help me if I were ill and alone?"

The girl fell back weakly upon her dingy pillow.

"Well, you are a queer one!" she sighed. "I wouldn't have come near you if I died for it! What do you want with me, anyway?"

The anger in her voice had given way to wonderment, and Jane put down her basket and advanced to the cot.

"Just to make you comfortable. If you'll let me, I'm going to heat some water and bathe you and then change your bed; you'll sleep ever so much better in fresh sheets."

Etta laughed drearily.

"I don't know where you think you are!" she exclaimed. "There isn't such a thing in the shack! I used to try to keep things halfway decent, for Pearl never

would bother, but I don't care any more; I don't even care if I *am* dirty! I wish you would go away and let me alone! That's all I want; to be left alone! Ma Heaney is an interfering old busybody!"

"With a great big heart." Jane smiled again. "You don't care now because you are ill, and of course, you want to be left alone. I'll be as quick as ever I can. I rather thought your friend Pearl would be too busy to look after you and keep things clean and all, so I brought along some fresh linen and my best night-dress. It always helped me to get well, to look as pretty as possible."

Etta stared but made no further objection, and Jane went about her ministrations with real joy in her heart.

When the sick girl, clean and refreshed, was back in the newly made cot, Jane brushed her short dark hair and then uncovered the dishes she had brought.

"There isn't much," she said apologetically. "One can't manage very much up here that is tempting, but there is some jelly and I'm going to heat the broth——"

She vanished into the kitchen and when she reappeared Etta was crying softly. Jane affected not to observe her tears but fed her and chattered cheerfully until she brought the ghost of a smile to the pale face.

The basket repacked, she approached the cot once more and held out her hand.

"Good-night," she said, "I'll come to-morrow, if you will let me. We have some eggs that are almost fresh and some canned peaches——"

The girl clasped the outstretched hand in her own burning one and drew Jane down close to her.

"I *wasn't* fair!" she sobbed. "I blamed you because

I wouldn't admit even to myself that he hadn't meant what he said! I couldn't bear the thought that he was tired! He'd promised to marry me and take me back to 'Frisco when the job was done here and I had just lived in that promise, trying to shut my eyes even when I saw what a beast he was! If I could be glad of anything, I'd be almost glad now that I didn't marry him, but I don't want to go on!"

"You will, though, as soon as you are stronger, and I'll see that you get back to 'Frisco if you would like to go. Now good-night, and try to rest. I will be over in the morning."

Jane went happily home, but the next day, as with basket replenished she took her way to the little shack on Harbor Street, she encountered Big Jim and the superintendent's labored air of surprise warned her that the meeting was no accidental one.

"Miss Jane," he began, awkwardly enough, "a girl named Pearl Sparkes has spread it all over town that you have been doing things for her sick friend Etta Carney, and I hope you won't take it amiss if I say a word. It is mighty good of you to do it, but that Etta—well, she's straight enough but she's tough and not your sort. I wouldn't interfere only after that note of Mr. MacLeod's I know you aren't just the assistant storekeeper; I would have seen from the first if I had had eyes in my head that you were a lady, and I feel sort of responsible for you——"

"So does Ped—father, and Jud Pittinger and ever so many more!" she laughed. "I appreciate your motive, Mr. Bowers, but Etta is just a girl, and sick and alone, and I don't believe I will be contaminated! How is the

work on the road getting on? They didn't have to suspend operations because of the fire, did they?"

"No, thank God! We managed to save enough from the warehouse to go on with until a new supply of material can be brought up, and Harve is going to send a special wire from Juneau."

"Do you know what was in the one he is sending for me?" Jane asked suddenly. "I am going to trust you, Mr. Bowers, for I've been thinking it over and I have come to the conclusion that you ought to know. You must all have thought it very strange for me to take up with a stranger like Ronald Winfield, and neglect my work at the store, but you see he wasn't a stranger; I knew who he was the minute I saw him, and I guessed why he had come, but I meant to find out from his own lips if I had to make him fall in love with me to do it! Do you know why he is here? It's to push the fight against us, and I am morally certain he knew beforehand that the warehouse was to be set on fire, if he didn't actually order it. The message I sent to Mr. MacLeod said: 'Winfield owns Unatika.'"

"Good God! That little skunk——"

"No. His father, and a greater scoundrel than Ronald. Have you ever heard of Gordon Winfield?"

Big Jim emitted a long, low whistle.

"So he's the nigger in the woodpile! Biggest crook in the game! I'm mighty glad you told me, Miss Jane; this Ronald boy won't be out of sight of one or another of our men for the rest of his stay here. And to think I told your father that he ought to speak to you about going around so much with him!" The superintendent's

honest face flushed. "I might have known you had something up your sleeve!"

"I don't see how you could!" Jane cried gayly. "If I wasn't the most infatuated girl north of Seattle it was because I am not a good enough actress, but I fooled Ronald!"

"You sure did!" Big Jim's face sobered. "Don't you think that Hoyt should know? Can't I just tell him who owns the Unatika and what this bright lad is here for, without letting on where I learned it?"

"Perhaps it would be best." Jane acquiesced somewhat reluctantly. "But I don't wish anyone to know my part in it except you; this is as important as that message yesterday."

"I understand and I will obey instructions, Miss Jane," he responded. "Only look out for trouble when that young pinhead realizes that we are on his trail."

Two days passed before Ronald suspected that he was shadowed; two long, self-centered days during which he sulked and waited for Jane to approach him and humbly beg his pardon for the broken engagement. No doubt as to the state of her feeling for him entered his mind; she was merely too sure of him, and trying the clumsy coquetry of her class.

But gradually it was borne in upon him that wherever he went by day the same lantern-jawed Yankee in rough working clothes seemed to be in the immediate vicinity, and at night a certain beetle-browed Hungarian appeared to have nothing better to do than to patrol the walk in front of Ma Heaney's.

Ronald had hung about town in the hope of catching a glimpse of Jane, but on the third day, in a state of

nerves bordering on panic, he determined to put his suspicions as to the espionage upon him to the test.

Taking his horse he rode out over the tundra by a circuitous route to the clump of cottonwoods where Jane had led him on their walk together, and in their shelter he waited. Presently the lantern-jawed Yankee appeared, his long legs hunched up to keep from dragging the ground on either side of his shaggy little mount, and drawing rein calmly a few yards away, produced a "chaw" of tobacco.

Ronald rode furiously up to him.

"What's the meaning of this?" he fumed. "How dare you follow me about?"

"Easy there, stranger," the other drawled. "One white man don't use that tone to another up here. I'm takin' a leetle ride for my health, and the road's free."

"That's a lie!" Ronald cried rashly. "You've been following me for days, and I want to know what you are after!"

The Yankee sighed and dismounted by the simple process of putting one foot down on the ground and swinging the other leg over his saddle.

"When folks talk 'lies' in this part of the country, they back it up with somethin' more than hot air," he announced. "Get off that plug before you're yanked off, and put up your hands."

It was a brief and inglorious combat and at its conclusion the lantern-jawed victor lifted Ronald, bloody and limp and weeping with impotent rage, into his saddle once more and gravely followed him back to town.

Meanwhile, Jane's ministrations had worked an almost miraculous cure, and Etta was about again, weak and

tottery, but with a hint of color in her wan cheeks, and an unwontedly soft glow in her eyes.

Peddar was virtuously shocked when she appeared shyly one day at the shack to thank her new friend, but warned by Jane's manner that he must make her feel welcome, he soon grew to accept her as he had the various other phenomena which in the past six weeks had turned his settled views of life into chaos.

Ronald appeared no more on the street of Katalak, but remained in his room at Ma Heaney's waiting in voluble impatience for the next steamer out. The Unatika people had made no further move, the temporary store was nearing completion, and save for the fact that she saw no more of the young engineer Jane was light of heart, when all at once the final blow fell.

"There's a beautiful boat in the harbor, Miss Jane," Etta announced one morning when she came to bring her a tiny plant which she had been fostering. "You ought to see it! It's called the 'Grey Gull' and Lew Nagle says it is a schooner yacht, a private one. A little rowboat came off from it, and brought a fine-looking gentleman and two ladies, and they had on the grandest clothes! Lew was down near the breakwater and they stopped and asked him where they could find a young man named Winfield, and he directed them to Ma Heaney's. He says it was worth two bits to see their faces—the ladies', I mean—when they saw what kind of a place it was! Why, what's the matter?"

For Jane had turned suddenly pale, and her hands gripped the nearest chairback as if for support.

"Did you see them yourself, Etta?" she asked. "Was

one of the ladies dark and handsome, and the other tall and slender and blonde?"

"I didn't see them, but that's the way Lew described them, only not just in those words. Do you know them?"

"I know of them." Jane passed her hand across her eyes. "Etta, will you do something for me?"

"Anything in this world!" Etta cried. "I'm just aching to do something to make up for how horrid I was to you!"

"You weren't, dear, but please go as quickly as you feel able to and bring Mr. Bowers here. No matter where he is or what he is doing I must see him at once. He will understand. Don't say anything to anyone else——"

But Etta had already gone and Jane sank limply into the chair. The Winfields had arrived en masse, and the unequal battle for the Northern Star had been brought into the open at last!

CHAPTER XVII

THE WIDENED BREACH

HOW long she sat there inert Jane never knew. She roused herself only to send Peddar on an errand that would keep him out of the way for an hour, and then sank again into an apathy of dismay. She had never seen Gordon Winfield, but the very name filled her with fear. He had been so ruthless, so tenacious in his scheme of vengeance upon them, and with the mine protected as he thought only by the outfit there were no lengths to which he would not go to drive them out and stop the building of the road.

And she was helpless to prevent him from carrying out his plan! With Juneau and its representatives of the law miles away he would have free scope for his operations. She dared not even show herself in the streets of Katalak again lest Adele Everton catch sight of her and betray her presence. She could only warn the superintendent and sit idly by!

But gradually as she waited the old fighting blood that was Jane's heritage asserted itself, and fear gave way to rage and an indomitable defiance. The first cargo of Winfield's materials had arrived and his surveyors

had been noticeably active on a line parallel with the Northern Star single track, but he could not start work yet and every day those shining rails were creeping up nearer and nearer to the glacier bed. Perhaps they had already reached it, for the time limit which Hoyt had fixed was at hand! She must not despair yet; there was still a fighting chance!

So it was that when Big Jim's massive tread sounded upon the porch she sprang up with flashing eyes and a bright spot of color in either cheek.

"Mr. Bowers, have you seen the schooner yacht in the harbor—Oh!" She uttered the exclamation in the sudden realization that he was not alone.

A thick-set, burly-looking man with a deeply tanned face and rather stern, dark eyes accompanied him, and now stood gazing keenly at Jane.

"Miss Peddar, this is Henry Rawlins, deputy marshal from Juneau," Big Jim announced. "He's come to look into the murder of that Italian, Pietro. I told him how you befriended the man, and the circumstances under which his body was found and if you have kept the note addressed to you that was on him, I wish you would show it to the deputy marshal. I told him, too, about the fire and the other dirty work that has been going on here, and I guess there will be no more of it."

Jane took the pitiful little note from the drawer in the table and handed it to the official who read it and nodded slowly.

"I think that about cleans it up," he said in a deep, husky voice. "Thank you, Miss. There isn't much chance of proving the murder on any of them, for no-

body saw it done and they'll all stick together, but at least they can't put it off on any of the Northern Star outfit. I'd better be getting back to town now and size up the situation in regard to these other outrages. See you later, Bowers."

He bowed to Jane and departed. She waited until the sound of his footsteps had died away and then turned to the superintendent.

"Did you meet Etta?"

He nodded.

"Thought I'd bring the deputy marshal along in case you wanted him."

"No. I would rather tell you first and you can let him know as much as is necessary later, but not a word more. And you must tell nothing, absolutely nothing, to Mr. Hoyt."

With Grace Winfield there in that very town, perhaps talking to him at that moment Jane felt that she would rather die than call upon the young engineer in this emergency.

"I understand," Big Jim nodded again gravely. "What is it, Miss Jane? Something about that yacht?"

"It belongs to Gordon Winfield. He and his niece and her companion are at Ma Heaney's now, conferring with Ronald."

Big Jim whistled.

"He's come up to see the finish, eh? Well, we'll try to make it as interesting as we can for him," he declared. "He won't run us out without the biggest battle that Alaska ever saw, and that's going some!"

"There is something greater behind it all than you

know yet, Mr. Bowers, something that means far more to him than beating us out on the road."

"The road means the mine. Of course, I know that——"

"The Unatika and Northern Star are both dummy companies," Jane spoke quickly. "I'm going to tell you all I can. Winfield is the deadliest personal enemy of the people who own the Northern Star, and when he found out who were back of that company he sent an expert up here who discovered the Unatika mine and Winfield bought it in to get the others out by hook or crook and wrest the mine from them. Now do you see? He will stop at nothing to gain his ends and there will be no time to notify the representatives of the Northern Star in New York, nor is there anything that they can do. You'll have to fight it out with Winfield alone."

"I see," the superintendent replied thoughtfully. "I know his reputation as a shrewd customer and a hard one, and if a question of personal enmity is involved—well, I guess we'll have our work cut out for us, but he won't beat us, at that! I don't see why the owners of the Northern Star don't come up themselves if they knew what's in the wind and take a hand."

Jane turned her head away.

"The principal owner is fighting in France," she said very softly.

"Oh!" Big Jim straightened and threw back his massive shoulders. "That's where I would be only they wouldn't take me, for all I'm a husk; got a heart's that's on the bum, they tell me, but it'll stick for the big show

here. Say, Miss Jane, did he go knowing what might happen up here?"

"I—I believe so," Jane murmured. "I suppose he thought it was his higher duty."

"Let me tell the boys just that, will you?" He took a quick step toward her. "Just let me tell them where their real boss is and why he went, risking everything. When they know that, if it comes to a battle they'll be worth ten men of the other outfit."

"Do you think it will make such a difference?" Jane asked. "They are mostly foreigners, aren't they?"

"They are Americans in theory, even the Hungarians! We had a few Bolsheviks among the Russians, but I reformed them." Big Jim clenched his mighty fist and glanced down at it retrospectively. "Let them know that while their boss is fighting for them he expects them to fight for him if it's necessary, and a whole army couldn't stop them! It's the personal element, don't you see, Miss Jane? They've been working for their pay, and they'd stick up for their own outfit to a certain point because they like young Hoyt and they are dead sore at the Unatika crowd for the dirty work they have been putting over, but the stuff that'll make them fight to the last ditch is in what you told me just now!"

"Very well, you may tell them then if you think best, but no one must know where you learned it," Jane warned him. "I've told you all I can, and there is nothing more that I can do to help. I'm going to be very ill."

"What's the matter?" Big Jim's face changed with almost comical swiftness, but Jane did not smile.

"I've got to be," she said grimly. "I never saw Gordon Winfield in my life, but there is someone in his party who would recognize me and it would make trouble. Just tell all the boys that I'm ill, but I don't want the company doctor; I only need rest. Don't let even Mr. Hoyt know the truth."

"All right, Miss Jane. I'll run up and tell you the news as often as I can, but if things get kind of hot and I can't leave I suppose Etta will bring you a message?"

"Yes, you can trust her, I'm sure." Jane held out her hand. "Good-by and good luck, Mr. Bowers. Tell the men I wish I could be with them, whatever comes."

When Peddar returned he found to his alarm that Jane was in bed.

"Oh, miss, whatever is it? I knew that coming up here would be the death of you! I knew it!"

"I'm just as well as you are this minute, but I've got to pretend I'm ill and if it could be done I'd make you go to bed, too!" Jane sat up. "As it is you mustn't go near Main Street again even for supplies, and I don't think you had better leave the house. Peddar, do you know who is here in Katalak?"

"No, miss. They do say that a party came in on a yacht this morning——"

"And Mrs. Everton is with them!" Jane interrupted. "If she sees either you or me, Peddar, it will spoil everything!"

"Mrs. Everton here!" he gasped. "You can't mean it, miss! Whatever brought her to Katalak?"

"Her friendship with the people on the yacht." Jane's

lips tightened. "I told you that no one here must know who I am, or that the Gildersleeves own the Northern Star. Mrs. Everton found out at home that the mine was ours, and she sold us out, Peddar; she betrayed us to the only enemy that Ollie and I have on earth! She is here with him and his party now, and he means to get the mine away from us if he can. He was my grandfather's enemy as well as ours, and his name is Gordon Winfield."

"Winfield!" Peddar ejaculated. "Not that young man's——"

"His father."

"But I thought it was the other mining company, the Unatika, who were trying to prevent the road from being built."

"Gordon Winfield owns the Unatika. His son told me, and that it what I went about with him for; to find out."

"Well, I must say I wish you had taken me into your confidence, miss, for I've had many an upset hour about you, I have indeed!" Peddar spoke in an injured tone. "I'm put in charge of you, and then I'm left in the dark! And that Mrs. Everton! After all your goodness to her she went and gave you and Mr. Ollie away? Well, I can't say as I am surprised, miss. I never trusted her, as you might say."

"It can't be helped now. We must only keep out of her way." Jane added: "Of course, she may hear our names mentioned, but it is hardly likely except from Ma Heaney, and she would scarcely hold any conversation with her. Ronald would be the last to speak of me, for

he'd be afraid his father would find out what he had told, and none of them will come in contact with any of our outfit. Besides, even if Mrs. Everton did hear the name 'Peddar' I doubt if she would connect it with us, for she thinks I am doing war work somewhere, and never in her wildest dreams would she expect to find us here."

In the meantime, Barney Hoyt had left the general office after a protracted conference with the superintendent and was making his way to the track where an engine waited to take him to the end of the road. It had reached the glacier bed and work was already begun on the trestle, but what he had just learned had turned his elation to grim foreboding. He knew now what the coming of Gordon Winfield portended, but the knowledge only steeled his determination to put the road through if it cost him his life.

He had not heard that any women were in the party from the yacht, and when he reached the end of the street and looking out along the track and saw a girl coming slowly toward him, his heart almost stood still. If it were Jane, she must have been looking for him; the first time she had sought him out since Ronald Winfield had appeared on the scene! He quickened his pace for a few strides and then abruptly halted, for the approaching girl was not Jane, after all. She was taller and more mature, and the hair beneath the jaunty red tam o' shanter was not red-gold, but a smooth, glossy black.

She was still too far off for him to distinguish her features clearly, but there was something in her stately carriage and the lithe undulation of her walk which

brought a memory back swiftly through the years, and warned him of the almost unbelievable truth.

The woman caught sight of him, paused and then came forward quickly with both hands outstretched.

"Barney!"

"How do you do, Grace?" He spoke quietly and without visible surprise or constraint as he shook hands.

"I heard that you were here, and I have been looking everywhere for you!" She was flushing and paling, and her dark eyes glowed. "Isn't it wonderful to meet again like this in such a far-off corner of the world! Take me somewhere where we can talk; there is so much to say!"

"Is there?" He looked steadily at her and there was no answering fire in his eyes. "I'm sorry, but there is nowhere I can take you except the office of Mrs. Heaney's lodging house; there are no tea-rooms in Katalak."

"Barney! Have you no warmer welcome for me after all these years?" she asked, and then hurried on as if fearful of his answer. "You do not seem surprised to see me."

"I presume you came with your uncle on his yacht."

"Yes, and I have a message for you from him." Grace hesitated, and then added slowly: "Barney, you were never ungenerous in the old days. Uncle Win wants you to let bygones be bygones and come and dine with us on the yacht to-night. Will you?"

"It is impossible." Hoyt frowned. "You forget that I have my work to do."

"But just this one evening, for a holiday!" Her tone was soft, with a wooing, compelling quality in it and she

laid her hand upon his sleeve. "You don't look as though you had many holidays, Barney."

"I am sorry." He ignored her last observation. "Please convey my regrets to your uncle."

"You are still angry with me? Barney, I was a little beast, but we were both children. You see I have waited, as you asked me to, after all." Her studied composure was shaken and her rich, contralto voice broke oddly. "I know this sounds hideously bold, but if you knew how I have suffered you would soften and be the old Barney once more! My uncle is as anxious to make amends as I for the inadvertent part he took in bringing about your trouble long ago; he is in a position to do much for you——"

"So that is it!" Hoyt spoke softly, and his lip curled with contempt. "That is the game! Upon my soul, I didn't think that you would stoop so low!"

"I?" Grace Winfield drew herself up and her eyes flashed. "I don't think that I quite understand."

"I gave you a message for your uncle in response to his invitation." Hoyt paused and then added deliberately: "I should like to change it. Please say to him that I am not open to a bribe."

The woman paled, but she held her head high, and returned his gaze.

"You must be mad! Why should my uncle wish to bribe you? We came up here for Ronald, who has been touring about, and when we found that you too were here—— Oh, Barney, don't you see? I wounded you deeply in the past, but my uncle knows how bitterly I

regret and he wishes only my happiness now. He can make the career of the man I——”

“Stop, Grace.” Before the sternness in his tone she dropped her eyes. “I cannot let you go on with your lies! He must have made it well worth your while for you to so humble yourself to do his dirty work for him! I know this sounds brutal, but I *feel* brutal. I wish to God that you were a man! Go back and tell your uncle, the owner of the Unatika mine, that I am here to fight him and all his crooked, cowardly gang to the last ditch! He cannot bribe me with his niece or his money and influence. I keep faith with the Northern Star, and the road goes through!”

The woman drew in her breath sharply between her parted lips, and for a moment there was silence between them. Neither saw the girl who had come out of a miserable shack farther up the street and drawn near watching them.

At last Grace raised her head and faced him once more, and her eyes glistened with tears.

“Very well, Barney, I will carry your message. I don’t know how you knew, but it is true, and I did my uncle’s bidding gladly! Do you know why? It was not for the reason that you think, not because he loaded me, a poor relation, with favors, but because after weary, lonely, bitter years I thought I saw the happiness which I had thrown away once more almost within my grasp, and I clutched desperately at the chance to atone, to live!” She drew a deep breath. “It is too late; I realize that now, but I don’t want you to think any

worse of me than you must. I love you, Barney. I always have, and I always shall. Good-by."

She held out her hand again with a little smile that was infinitely weary and Hoyt's expression softened.

"I am sorry, Grace, deeply sorry." The eavesdropper had turned and sped away on noiseless feet, and only the engine puffing impatiently far up the track betrayed a sign of life about them. "I wish you had not told me!"

"Why not?" Grace shrugged. "Perhaps some small measure of vengeance is due to you. I shall return to my uncle and tell him that I have failed. Will you try to think a little kindly of me, when you think of me at all?"

Wordlessly he pressed her hand, but she drew it slowly away and bowing her head turned and left him.

"What do you think? Why, where's Miss Jane?" Etta demanded, as she flew past Peddar on the porch and into the empty livingroom.

"Here, dear," Jane called from her open bedroom door. "What is it? Has anything happened?"

"You're sick!" Etta hesitated at the door, and then advanced to the bed. "Oh, what is the matter?"

"I think I must have caught a little cold," responded Jane evasively. "It isn't serious. But tell me what has happened."

"Nothing, only—you know those two ladies that I told you about, who came off the yacht?"

Jane nodded and raised herself upon one elbow in the bed.

"Well, one of them—it must have been the dark,

handsome one that Lew Nagle described—she knows the engineer of the company you work for—Mr. Hoyt.” Etta halted as if uncertain how to proceed and then plunged on: “I had a row with Pearl, and was leaving the shack when I saw a girl dressed all in white with a red tam, out near where the track begins, and she was talking to a man. I knew she didn’t belong in Katalak, and supposed she must be one of that party from the yacht so I went nearer to have a look at her. Then I saw that she had her hand on the man’s sleeve and was looking up into his face and it was Mr. Hoyt. They didn’t know I was on earth, and I got up real close to them. Honestly, I didn’t mean to listen——”

“Etta!” Jane stopped her with a little cry. “It wasn’t nice of you, and you mustn’t tell me. I will not listen——”

“Well, if people talk out their private affairs like that in public anybody might hear them!” Etta retorted in an injured voice. “I was crazy about Hugh Malison, but at least I didn’t go around telling him that I loved him, like that girl did! ‘I love you, Barney.’ She said it just as plain as day and then I turned to beat it; I knew it wasn’t any place for me! Think of it! Him in all his rough clothes and she looking as though she stepped out of a picture, except for the mud on her shoes. What’s the matter? Do you feel real sick, Miss Jane?”

For Jane had closed her eyes and sank back upon her pillows. At the question she put one hand quickly to her forehead.

“My head aches a little; it’s this daylight all the time,

I think. I'm not accustomed to it yet." She spoke in almost feverish haste. "I'll be all right to-morrow. Etta, you mustn't tell anyone else what you heard; it isn't quite fair, you know, and you shouldn't have listened."

"I won't," Etta promised. "I'll let you sleep now, but if you are not better when I come to-morrow I'm going to stay here and nurse you the way you did me."

When she had gone Jane got up and slipping on a warm dressing-gown went to prepare supper. She told herself fiercely that the news which Etta had brought was only what she should have expected, and the love affairs of the young engineer were no concern of hers, but somehow the idea of lying there inactive was intolerable to her. She did not want to be alone with her own thoughts, and even Peddar's company was better than none.

"You've eaten nothing, miss; you'll be really sick the first thing you know," Peddar ventured, after manfully cleaning his own plate. "If you'd let me make you a cup of tea maybe it would taste better to you; you've made this in the coffee pot."

Jane pushed back her chair, and walking over to the couch flung herself upon it.

"I don't want anything, Peddar. You clean up; I'm tired."

"Of course, miss." He spoke reproachfully. "I wouldn't think of allowing you to touch the dishes, and it was no wish of mine for you to soil your hands getting supper. What with the dreadful way we have lived up here I doubt that we'll ever get back in our own

proper station again. Demoralizing, I call it. Think of it, miss, if after we go home I should forget and call you 'Jane!'

The horror in Peddar's face was so genuine that Jane smiled in spite of herself.

"It will be worse when I call you 'father,' as I probably shall!" She sighed wearily. "We may never go back to the old life, Peddar. If the road doesn't go through Ollie and I will be poor, you know."

"Well, it can't be worse than this, miss," observed Peddar philosophically. "We'd be among gentlefolk, anyway, and I've no doubt Mr. Ollie would make good like his father and grandfather before him. It's the family, not money that counts. Was that a knock?"

He was at the door before Jane could make her escape, and at sight of the visitor she stood rooted to the spot. It was Barney Hoyt who stood upon the threshold.

"I have only just heard that you were ill!" He did not seem to see Peddar, who stood before him the picture of outraged propriety. "Isn't there something I can do? The company doctor isn't much good, but if you like I'll send to Juneau; I—I'd go myself——"

"Thank you, Mr. Hoyt." Jane's voice was crisply cool as she drew her dressing-gown closely about her. "I don't need any doctor. It was very kind of you to call and inquire, but there is nothing you can do. I only need rest and—to be undisturbed."

Hoyt's face crimsoned.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "I did not mean to intrude; I thought that I might be of some service.

I trust you will be better soon. Good-night, Mr. Peddar."

He bowed and turning on his heel walked off the porch and away, while Jane went blindly to her room. She lay there for long staring into the uncanny brightness of the night, and the voice of that other woman which she had never heard seemed to ring in her ears: "I love you, Barney."

She buried her head in the pillow to keep out the sound but it was no use. He had come to show an act of kindness to the little storekeeper, but his heart was with this woman of her enemy's people. Gordon Winfield's revenge was greater than he knew.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CALL TO ARMS

A WEEK passed and Hoyt came not again to the little shack, but Jim Bowers, who appeared nearly every day, reported that he was working day and night and the temporary trestle, strong enough to hold a timber car, was almost completed.

Jane kept Peddar religiously within doors and that faithful servitor began to look worn from the strain of coping with his little mistress' uncertain temper. He had been accustomed since her nursery days to sudden flares-up and as quick repentance, but to see her sit for hours in what he mentally termed "the sulks" only to rise and pace the shaky floor of the kitchen as though she were caged proclaimed a mood which was new to him.

"Whatever's come over her, sir?" he asked Big Jim one day, with an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. "She never answers me at all except it's to take my head off, and she doesn't eat nor yet sleep, for I hear her tossing about all night. I doubt but that she'll be really sick if this keeps up."

Jane had explained to him that the superintendent had been taken into their confidence sufficiently to make him

believe that she was in Katalak as a sort of private agent of the owners of the Northern Star, and that her illness was a ruse to avoid an encounter with some member of the Winfield party, but he was not entirely sure of his ground with the keen-eyed visitor, and nervousness made him revert unconsciously to the servile attitude of less complex days.

It was not lost upon Big Jim, but the latter merely nodded.

"Don't you mind," he said consolingly. "She's kind of worried, I guess. We all are. It seems as if we were all sitting on a big lid that was liable to blow off any minute and land us sky high. That Unatika outfit has been too quiet and there's trouble brewing, sure. We'll almost feel better when it comes, for then we'll know where we stand."

It was true. With the arrival of the Winfields a tension had appeared in the air which heightened with each day that passed. The men themselves felt it and they needed no urging to work with might and main, especially after the little speech which the superintendent had made to the assembled outfit in which he told them that the man for whom they were working was in France. His psychology had been sound and their interest now was a matter of personal, individual account.

The week had not been uneventful even in the little shack, for Etta brought news and Ma Heaney, when she heard of Jane's supposed illness, fairly camped upon the doorstep, nor were Peddar's broadest hints of avail to dislodge her.

"I don't care if she is your daughter," she remarked

good-humoredly on the occasion of her second visit, two days after the appearance of the "Grey Gull" in the harbor. "No man ain't capable of takin' care o' sickness. My three husbands were every one of 'em ready for a scrap any time, against any odds, but let 'em get a cold in the head and they thought they was gone, sure. There ain't anythin' the matter with Miss Jane as I see, but maybe your cookin', and I don't wonder at it! The lodgers can look out for themselves, now I got that snivelin' young swell off my hands. Oh, Miss Jane!"

"Yes, Ma Heaney?" Jane called invitingly albeit with a rueful face.

"What do you think is all over town?" Ma Heaney brushed Peddar aside unceremoniously and advanced into the bedroom. "That young man's father who come on the yacht owns the Unatika mine! He ain't makin' any secret of it; come ashore and hired Hank's jitney yesterday and drove out to the outfit as bold as brass. He wanted it to-day but Hank told him it was bu'sted; guess it would have been if he'd let him have it again for the Northern Star men are fightin' mad. Anyway, Hank said he'd be shot—only he put it stronger—if he'd do a favor to any man that had all but burned the Happy Days down over his head when the warehouse was set on fire. It's as well that party sleeps on the yacht, for there'd be no room for 'em under my roof, and I only wisht I'd known what I do now when that Ronald was with me! To think of him sittin' alongside o' me while the warehouse and store went up in smoke, and his father's own outfit responsible for it!"

"But the ladies that came with Mr. Winfield; are they ashore very much?" asked Jane.

"Not since the day before yesterday, just after the yacht anchored. When Ronald met 'em in my office he called one of 'em 'Cousin Grace,' but he didn't know the other at all, and Cousin Grace introduced 'em. You can bet I was listenin' with all my ears, but I didn't catch the name, just 'Mrs. Ever' something. I tried to make myself pleasant but they was as stuck-up as a sour-dough with his first pay-dirt and I let 'em alone. I saw Cousin Grace goin' up Main Street by 'herself that afternoon, and in an hour she come back lookin' like somethin' had fell on her, and went on down to the rowboat that was waitin' for her at the breakwater. Neither of 'em has showed up since."

Jane pondered for long after Ma Heaney's departure. Would a girl who was just reconciled to the man she loved after years of estrangement look "as if something had fallen on her?" Could it be that Etta had been mistaken, had not heard aright? No doubt of Hoyt's loyalty to the cause of the Northern Star entered Jane's mind, but the fact that he was at swords' points with the Winfields would not have militated against his renewed love for their relative. Perhaps they had decided not to meet again under the present conditions, and that would account for her troubled look.

Jane could not know, of course, why Gordon Winfield had put aside all subterfuge and allowed the knowledge of his ownership of the Unatika to become public, but it looked as though the crisis were indeed at hand.

Etta came in on the eighth day after Winfield's ar-

rival and announced with a giggle that she had been sent to prepare the way for another visitor.

"It's your storekeeper, Jud Pittinger," she announced. "Just wait till you see him, Miss Jane! He's all dressed up in regular clothes and he looks for all the world like a minister! He stopped me outside the Full Blast and told me to ask you if you felt able to see him. I do wish I knew what was the matter with you!" she added irrelevantly. "You look sick enough, but you won't stay in bed——"

"Jud Pittinger is a dear! Of course, I'll see him." Jane rose and started to arrange her hair. "How soon will he be here?"

"When the barber gets through with him, I expect. He's gone there to get polished off. Cliff Bishop hardly knew him when he came up as we were talking——"

"Etta," Jane interrupted her. "This Cliff Bishop is the—the faro dealer at the Full Blast, isn't he? I hear that you used to work for him."

Etta flushed.

"There was nothing crooked about it," she protested. "A fellow had better lose his money that way than over the bar, and he always got a square deal. Cliff's the whitest gambler in Alaska."

"I don't question that, but wasn't there some other way for you to earn a living?" Jane asked gently. "It doesn't seem the sort of thing you would want to do, somehow."

"I worked in a store once, like you," Etta volunteered. "It was down in 'Frisco, and I would have been there yet, I suppose, if a man I met hadn't told me that

I had a voice, and put me on to sing between reels at a movie house. After a while I heard that there was big money in singing up here and so I came, but the climate took away what voice I had, and my savings were gone. I had to do something. I didn't think a capper was so dreadful; you can get used to a lot of things."

"Do you feel yet that you want to go back to San Francisco? I told you that I would help you if you did," Jane reminded her.

"I know, and it's awfully good of you, Miss Jane, but I think I would rather go East by and by." The girl hesitated. "You see, I talked a lot about what a success I was going to make of it up here, and I would hate to go home with my voice gone, and hunt for a job."

"I know how you must feel," Jane smiled. "Perhaps you can come with us when my father and I go home."

Etta's enthusiastic reply was cut short by a timid knock upon the door and Jane herself opened it.

"This is very kind of you, Mr. Pittinger," she said. "Come right in. Father, give Mr. Pittinger that chair; it's the only sound one in the house."

Jud shook hands solemnly with her and Peddar, coughed and seated himself gingerly in the chair indicated.

"Just thought I'd drop in and see how you was, Miss Jane." He ran a fat forefinger between his neck and the collar which girded it. "I opened up shop yesterday in the new shack and the boys all but mobbed me. They kept comin' in from each shift askin' about you and it's

my opinion the whole outfit would have been out here if Big Jim hadn't warned 'em off."

"Oh, I'm glad they thought of me!" Jane's eyes shone. "I wish I could be back now behind the counter with you. Going, Etta?"

The girl had appeared pulling on her coat.

"Yes. I didn't tell you, but Ma Heaney told me to come in to-day and see about helping her with the lodging house. It's—it's better than the Full Blast. Good-by."

"Turned out to be a right nice girl, didn't she?" Jud gazed approvingly after her, and Peddar, with the wistful longing of a shut-in for a bit of gossip, followed her out to the porch. "There's lots o' good in everybody if folks would only help it to come out. I tried to preach that in my sermons years ago——"

He paused, reddening, but it was too late.

"Etta said you looked like a minister, all dressed up as you are now!" Jane exclaimed. It seemed to be her day for confidence. "That is why you never swear?"

Jud nodded.

"Had a little church back in Arkansas," he said. "Don't say anything to the boys about it, Miss Jane, for you know how they would all give me the laugh! I never meant to let it out."

"I won't," Jane assured him and hesitated. One must not ask too many questions in Alaska.

As if divining her thought Jud said hurriedly:

"I come up here first as a missionary—though you'd never think it—but the gold fever hit me hard, and when that gets you, preacher or no, you've just naterally got to get it out of your system. I fought against it,

but the Lord knew best, I guess; I was a mighty poor preacher, anyway," he added naïvely. "I wrote back to the convention and resigned and then started mushin' North, but I never struck pay dirt. When I got clean discouraged I took a job as company storekeeper for some fellers that did, and that's how I come to be here."

"But why didn't you go back to your church?" Jane asked.

"I didn't feel the call," responded Jud simply. Then as Peddar opened the door he added: "I didn't come to pester you with past history, Miss Jane. When will you feel able to get back to the store? I found that the boys managed to save some other stuff from the fire; boots and clothes and those boxes of fancy razors, and I kind o' need your help. Seems like I couldn't hardly get along without you much longer."

Jane's heart warmed at the kindly lie, but she shook her head.

"I don't know, Mr. Pittinger. I feel tired and head-achey all the time and I shouldn't be much good to you, I am afraid. I'll be all right in a week or so, I think, and the new stock won't come up before then, will it?"

"A week or so," Jud repeated slowly. "I guess the Unatika will show their hand before then, and maybe give us a chance to run the whole outfit out o' the country the way we run Malison out o' Katalak. That deputy marshal is stickin' close, but I hear that Winfield has bought more than one jury in the East, and he'll be willin' to take his chances at squarin' himself with the Juneau outfit for any trouble he raises here. It looks like things were comin' to a showdown."

Jane's eyes flashed.

"I hope they do!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Bowers says that the outfit is loyal to a man, and their fighting blood is up; besides the trestle is almost finished. Winfield has tried every legal resource in the last year, in the name of the Unatika, of course, to oust the Northern Star, and there is nothing left to him but open violence. Anything would be better than this waiting!"

Jud visibly hesitated.

"It's hard to know just where meanness stops and righteousness begins, in this world," he remarked. "I allus used to preach agin talebearing an' scandal, but a feller off that there yacht o' Winfield's told me somethin' mighty curious last night. It kinder bears on that old rapsallion's methods up here an' as long as I don't know no names to mention, I guess mebbe it won't do no harm to tell you."

"A fellow off the yacht?" repeated Jane wonderingly.

"One of the sailors. He'd been hittin' it up at the Happy Days and he stopped at the door o' the shack I'm usin' for a store, just plumb bu'stin' to talk to anybody that would listen. It's a good thing for him none o' the boys was there, but bein' alone I let him ramble on.

"It seems that on the evenin' o' the day they anchored he was out on deck near one o' the little windows o' a room he called the 'saloon,' when he heard loud talking and looked in. One o' the ladies—the dark complected one—was facin' the old man across the table, an' both o' 'em was madder'n grizzlies. The old feller yelled: 'Did you show him what I could do for him if he would

be sensible?' an' the lady smiled in a sneerin' kind o' way.

" 'I obeyed your instructions, an' he gave me this message for you,' she says. 'He told me to tell you, the owner o' the Unatika mine, that he's here to fight your crooked, cowardly gang to the last ditch, an' you can't bribe him with your niece or your money. He keeps faith with the Northern Star an' the road goes through.' Now, what do you make o' that, Miss Jane?"

"Oh!" Jane's voice sounded oddly choked and she averted her eyes lest the shrewd, kindly ex-preacher read the sudden radiance in them. "I suppose Gordon Winfield must have tried to bribe somebody, but how can we know——"

"My Gawd! Where is everybody!" The front door crashed open and Ma Heaney's voice reverberated through the little shack. "Oh, Mr. Peddar, it's come! The fight's on!"

"What?" Jane sprang through the doorway and confronted her, and the trembling, white-faced Etta.

"They're fixin' for a pitched battle out at the trestle! Joe Zurak rode in on an engine for help and he says Mr. Hoyt's leadin' the men, but they're almost hopelessly outnumbered, for the Unatika outfit is nearly twice as big and that devil Winfield has even got the sailors off the yacht to reinforce 'em. Every man-jack in Katalak, gamblers and sour-doughs and all, are loadin' up on the flat cars to go out and fight for the Northern Star, but they may not get there in time!" Ma Heaney paused to draw breath and then added: "It's five miles or more, and Joe says they've undermined the track in

spots. Folks thought it was funny that the Unatika knocked off work around their warehouse last night and not a soul was seen there this morning except the watchman, but nobody thought of this. Why, Miss Jane! What are you going to do?"

Jud Pittinger had long since vanished, and Jane had rushed back into her bedroom and was hastily pulling on her warm outer clothes.

"I'm going to town," Jane replied through set teeth. "Help me, Etta! My boots! Lace them any old way. . . . Now my cloak. . . . Dear God, if I may only be in time!"

"Oh, miss, you mustn't!" Peddar quavered, while the eyes of Ma Heaney and Etta opened wide. "You mustn't get in it! Mr. Ollie would never forgive me——"

"Ollie isn't here to take his place but I am! These men are fighting for me! If you try to stop me now, Peddar, I believe I'll kill you!"

He put out a futile, trembling arm, but she dashed it aside and sprang out of the doorway. Peddar sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands and Ma Heaney and Etta, after one look at each other, unceremoniously picked up their skirts and followed Jane.

She was still in sight, running with almost incredible swiftness through the clogging mud, but she disappeared around the corner of Main Street, and when they, too, had turned it they came upon an astonishing scene.

Before the door of the lodging house stood the entire party from the yacht, with Jud Pittinger unnoticed just behind, and confronting them, rigid with defiance, stood Jane. In the tension of the moment no one was aware

that a large steamer, out of all keeping with her schedule, had slipped into the harbor.

The Winfield party seemed petrified with astonishment, but at last the blonde lady found her voice.

“Janetta Gildersleeve!”

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE AT THE TRESTLE

YES, Janetta Gildersleeve!" Jane's voice trembled with wrath and contempt. "You found out beneath our roof that my brother and I owned the Northern Star and you sold your knowledge to this man who is our enemy!"

Jud Pittinger's eyes nearly protruded from his head and Ma Heaney gripped Etta's arm in a convulsive grasp while Gordon Winfield, his face enpurpled, stepped forward.

"You—you are Janetta Gildersleeve?" he thundered.

Jane sent a fleeting glance at the chagrined Ronald and then her eyes met those of his father in an answering challenge.

"I am, and I have been here for weeks watching every move of the crooked outfit working under your orders! You bribed this woman who was eating our bread, but neither you nor your niece could bribe Barney Hoyt, thank God! You thought you had ruined us once before but you failed, just as you're going to fail now! Your outfit is fighting mine out at the trestle while you skulk

here in safety, but I'm going out there to show my boys that I'm with them! Jud!"

She had caught sight of the storekeeper and beckoning to him, turned and crossed the street while the Winfields gazed after her speechlessly.

"Jud, you've got to get me out there—out to the trestle, I mean! There isn't a minute to be lost!"

"But, ma'am!" Jud stammered, still in a daze from the revelation which had come to him. "There ain't a thing left to go in! Every flat car on the open track and all the wagons are gone, even to Hank's jitney! I got left behind and was lookin' for some way o' gettin' out there myself when I saw you."

"There must be some way!" Jane cried. "Look! What is Etta pointing for?"

Etta had run back to the corner of Harbor Street and now she waved frantically to them.

"There's an engine on the track with steam up!" she screamed, when they had approached close enough to hear her. "The smoke is curling up but I don't see anyone near it!"

"Jud, can you drive an engine?" Jane demanded.

"I did once and by the Lord, I can again!" Jud set off at a clumsy trot. "Come on!"

They were not aware of the breathless elderly figure which tottered wildly along in their wake, for their eyes were fixed upon the engine puffing and vibrating as though it, too, were eager to be off to the scene of the conflict.

"The feller drivin' it must have left it to go on the

last timber car out," Jud remarked as he climbed in. "Don't know how I can fire her——"

"I'll fire up for you!" Jane announced. "It only means shoveling coal in, doesn't it? For God's sake hurry! There are bad spots on the track, but if the loaded timber cars got over it in safety we can!"

Jud fumbled for a moment with unaccustomed hands and then slowly and jerkily the engine started. It had scarcely moved its length when a hand clutched the rail, and Peddar, exhausted but triumphant, swung himself into the cab.

"Peddar!"

"Yes, miss," he gasped, wiping his streaming face on his sleeve. "I'm going with you where you go, or your blood would be on my head!"

"You take the shovel and fire up when you get your breath, Peddar," Jud ordered. "I'm going to get all the speed out of her I can."

The puffing had changed to a singing hum which in turn gave place to a subdued roar as the old engine gathered herself together and leaped forward. Jane relinquished the shovel to Peddar and fell back, clinging to anything she could reach as they rocked perilously from side to side. The tundra with its bunches of green, stunted grasses flew past them in a blur, and the heat of the furnace beat back in waves upon her face.

Jud Pittinger sat motionless with his hand upon the throttle, and his eyes fixed upon the track ahead. He had not spoken since that swift injunction to Peddar, but all at once he gave a warning shout.

It was drowned in a grinding crash as the engine

lurched sickeningly, tilted, wavered and finally righted herself and plunged on.

"That was a close call!" Jud muttered, and then raising his voice: "That must have been one of those bad spots in the track you spoke of, ma'am."

"Yes," Jane screamed back above the roar of the exhaust. "Joe Zurak said they'd undermined it."

Jud made no response, but his face set in even sterner lines as he bent more closely to his task. The flat lands were left behind them and they were mounting steadily into the foothills, but to Jane the miles seemed unending and the minutes like so many hours.

Would they be in time? The question beat hammer strokes upon her brain. Would they reach the trestle only to find the battle lost? She had no tangible idea as to the impulse which urged her on, only the unreasoning conviction that she must be there with the men who were her comrades and who might even now be giving their lives for her and her brother, that the road might go through and the mine be saved!

Yet one figure alone stood out before her mental vision. Barney Hoyt, faithful to his trust, facing that bestial mob! No word of love had passed between them and until within the hour she had believed that his heart was in another woman's keeping, but now in this moment of stress an instinct surer than reason brought the truth home to her. He was her man and he was in danger; her place was by his side.

And now, mingling with the noise of the engine, there came a new sound, a steady, ominous drone like the humming of multitudinous, gigantic bees in some Gar-

gantuan hive, and as they rounded a curve on screeching, protesting wheels the trestle came into view. The engine slowed and stopped with a jerk which almost threw Jane off her feet, but she steadied herself mechanically, her eyes fixed upon the scene before her.

Grouped at the nearer end of the trestle she saw the men of the Northern Star outfit supplemented by those who had been hastily recruited from the town. They were massed together, tense and almost motionless, gazing across the structure which was dotted with disordered heaps of figures, writhing and still. Down the rough sledge track on the other side of the glacier bed a vast horde was moving steadily like an advancing wave, and it was from their throats that the menacing drone issued, the infernal diapason of mob-music vibrating with the lust to kill.

"Stood 'em off once, thank God!" Jud exclaimed. "They're comin' on again, though. Jehosaphat! Look at the number of 'em! Rifles, too, the murderin' dogs!"

But Jane did not heed. After one comprehensive glance in which the scene was imprinted on her brain with photographic intensity, she leaped from the cab and ran along the track to that waiting crowd, not a man of which turned at the engine's approach.

One thought only dominated her mind, one desire obsessed her; Hoyt must be there on the trestle at the head of his men facing that oncoming horde, and somehow she must reach his side.

"Let me through!" she cried savagely, elbowing her way into the press. "Let me pass!"

The men turned with grunts of astonishment and familiar faces surged about her.

"Ay, let her through, boys!" Jud roared behind her. "Miss Jane's your real boss and you're fightin' for her. She owns the Northern Star!"

It was doubtful if in the stress of the moment one-tenth of those who heard him comprehended the import of his speech, but those who did took up the cry and a rising cheer mounted upon the surcharged air.

Mechanically they made a lane for her through which Jane passed to the forefront of the crowd. Hoyt, Harve Dugdale and Big Jim Bowers were standing shoulder to shoulder awaiting the coming onrush, but they, too, turned as the sound of cheering reached their ears, and when the girl herself appeared they were petrified with amazed consternation.

The enemy mob under the leadership of Hugh Malison had reached the far end of the trestle and were advancing slowly across it in a densely packed mass, but at the sight of the feminine figure they halted despite Malison's exhortations.

"Good God!" Hoyt groaned. "What are you doing here? Get back! Boys, take her away!"

Jane tried to protest, but the cheer rose again deafeningly behind her, and this time there was an answering roar from the Unatika outfit as, their momentary hesitation passed, they charged over the trestle.

Jane caught a fleeting glimpse of Malison just as he raised his rifle and aimed pointblank at her. She did not know that one of his own men knocked it aside for Hoyt had caught her up and thrust her into the

arms of a certain brawny, lantern-jawed Yankee who stood just behind him.

"Pass her back!" he commanded. "See that she reaches the rear and guard her!"

The lane had closed up and Jane found herself being half-dragged and half-carried back through the surging throng. Then came a fusillade of shots, a weaker answering one, and the crowd dashed forward bearing her with them as if upon a mighty wave of the sea.

Rocks and broken hunks of concrete were flying through the air and all at once the arms of the man who held her loosened and fell, and he stood for a moment upheld by the crush with an expression of almost comical surprise on his face. Then as those about him swept on he slipped gently to the ground and lay motionless.

Jane gasped and staggered as a sensation of dizziness assailed her, but she fought it resolutely down and turned blindly, instinctively back to the fray. The civilization bred of centuries had sloughed from her in that hour, and it was the primitive woman seeking to aid and defend her mate who plunged back, struggling and fighting her way savagely through the serried crowd to the thick of the conflict.

The two opposing factions had met in the middle of the trestle, and were battling with whatever weapons had come to their hands; guns, knives, crowbars, picks and shovels all bore their part, and strange pictures presented themselves kaleidoscopically before the girl's eyes as she pressed on.

She had forgotten her companions of that wild ride

from Katalak and now as if in a dream she saw Peddar armed with the shovel to which he had clung facing a swarthy Italian in whose upraised hand something gleamed. The hand descended and Peddar went down like an ox just as Jud Pittinger felled his adversary with a stout spruce club.

Harve Dugdale and Big Jim Bowers were the center of a struggling ring of men and fighting with every ounce of strength in their mighty bodies, but where was Barney Hoyt?

The shots and shouts and curses and sound of blows were mingled so indistinguishably in Jane's ears that she did not hear a report close at hand nor realize what the stinging pain in her shoulder meant. Her eyes were searching everywhere in that struggling mass for Barney Hoyt. Had he fallen? Had they killed him?

She stumbled over something and stooped mechanically to pick it up. It was a wrench, short but heavy enough to be a formidable weapon in weaker hands than hers, and as she straightened she saw the young engineer at last! He was far out on the trestle facing Malison alone and between them and herself the main part of the battle raged. But she must get through!

Jane never afterward knew how she reached them. She moved seemingly without conscious volition, ducking, dodging, squirming between the combatants while blows rained down about her and bullets whistled past her ears. She saw only those two savagely contending figures ahead.

Hoyt was fighting with his bare fists, but Malison had clubbed his gun and was striving for an opening to bring

it down upon his adversary's head. Could it be that Barney was weakening? He seemed to be giving way inch by inch, and he would get no quarter from Malison!

A prayer rose to Jane's lips and her grasp of the wrench tightened as she cleared the last group of struggling men and raced down the trestle. She was deaf to the heavy rumble and roar on the track behind her, deaf to the mighty cheer which rose, and unconscious of the fact that a sudden stunned silence had fallen immediately thereafter upon the noise of conflict.

She only knew that even as the prayer died upon her lips Barney Hoyt went down beneath a treacherous blow, and Malison, with a hideous distorted smile, threw aside his gun and reached into his pocket.

Before he could withdraw his hand a slender, sinuous body had hurled itself upon him and the wrench descended with crushing force upon his head. He crumpled and falling toppled over the edge of the trestle and down upon the glacier bed far below.

With a shuddering sob Jane dropped the wrench and fell upon her knees beside Hoyt's body. She tried to speak to him but her voice sounded far away in her own ears and a dark, whirling void opened before her. She fought with her last strength against the rising faintness which was fast overcoming her, striving to lift Hoyt's head, but one arm hung limp and useless at her side and the other, wavering, would not obey her will.

Slowly the darkness descended wholly, and her head drooped until it rested upon his breast.

She could not know that the steamer which had stolen silently into the harbor brought reinforcements from a

far-off unlooked-for source; that they had arrived on a string of timber cars at the last moment and the tide of battle, changing, had become an utter rout for the forces of the Unatika.

After countless ages she emerged for a brief space from the void into which she had fallen, but she knew that she must be delirious, for the stern face of Uncle Andy, oddly distorted and glistening as with tears, seemed to be within a few inches of her own, and Ollie—Ollie was there! Then, as though upon a screen, Uncle Andy faded out and the rough, homely countenance of Adam MacLeod was superimposed. Jane smiled, and smiling, drifted off once more into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XX

THE RIGHT OF WAY

A STRANGE, dual personality seemed to possess Jane with her next coherent thought. She was still delirious yet sane enough to know it and to be distinctly annoyed with the state of affairs. She lay with closed eyes trying to drive the mists from her brain and silence the phantom voices which sounded in her ears.

For that crazy dream of Ollie and Uncle Andy and Adam MacLeod had changed to an even more impossible one. Persis Cheever was thousands of miles—the width of a continent—away, and yet it was Persis' low, well-remembered tones which seemed to come from close at hand and the voice of Billy Cheever which replied to her.

"No. No change yet," Persis seemed to be saying. "Tell them I'll let them know the moment there is."

"You're sure it is only loss of blood?" Jane thought how strange it was that Billy's little trick of quick, chopped-off speech should have lingered subconsciously in her brain. She had not even thought of the Cheevers for weeks! "Geddes is planning murder, I know, and poor old Mac looks as if he could go hang himself!"

"Tell them to be patient, Billy-Bumpkins. There is nothing to do but wait."

Then there came the sound of a softly closing door and silence once more.

"Billy-Bumpkins" indeed! That was Persis' pet name for her husband; why should it have come into Jane's mind now, of all things? That was all a part of delirium, of course, to remember silly little phrases which never occurred to one normally.

But why on earth was she lying there and why should she be delirious? She hadn't been ill; it must all be simply a bad dream.

But it wasn't! She was assuredly lying on some kind of a bed, but there was a strange, pungent odor in the room and one of her arms seemed to be bound as if in a vise. What in the world has happened?

Then in a searing flash of memory the battle at the trestle came back to her, and the vision of Barney Hoyt beaten, stricken down at her feet!

"Barney!" She thought that she screamed his name, but it was the merest whisper which came from her lips.

Instantly a cool hand was laid upon her forehead, and Persis' voice came soothingly, unmistakably to her ears.

"Janey! What is it, dear? This is Persis; don't you know me?"

Jane opened her eyes at last and knew that the unbelievable had happened, for it was really Mrs. Cheever who stood beside her!

"Oh, Persis!" she sobbed. "Is he dead? Did they kill him?"

"Who, dear?" The other's eyebrows went up ever so slightly.

"Barney. Barney Hoyt! I tried to get to him in time but I couldn't! Malison had him down, and then I struck Malison with the wrench and he fell off the trestle! Is Barney dead?"

"No, dear, he's very much alive, if you mean the young engineer. He was only cut and bruised a little, and he will be all right again in no time." Persis hesitated. "You may see him if you like, by and by, but you must rest now. Drink this, dear."

She held a glass to the girl's lips and Jane drank obediently, then fell back on her pillow with a bewildered expression.

"What happened to my arm?" she asked drowsily. "I don't remember getting hurt."

"Oh, that is nothing!" Persis replied hastily, with studied carelessness. "Just a sprain. Try to sleep, Janey."

"But the road! The right of way to the mine! Winfield——"

"Winfield is beaten and the right of way is yours! Now close your eyes, Janey. Go to sleep."

Jane smiled blissfully. Barney wasn't dead after all! The fight was won, and somehow, miraculously, Persis was here. Her lids dropped and a gentle warmth stole through her veins. It was good to be alive. . . .

Andrew Geddes, Billy Cheever, Adam MacLeod and a tall young man in khaki were grouped upon the porch

of the little shack when Persis opened the door and came out.

"Janey will be all right now," she announced. "She was conscious but very weak, and I gave her that sleeping stuff the doctor left. She's a real Gildersleeve, Mr. Geddes, for her last question was about the road and the right of way. Now what I want to know is: who in this world is this young engineer, Barney Hoyt?"

After countless aeons of time Jane awoke once more and drank the broth which Persis brought her. Then she settled herself determinedly in her pillows.

"It will be no use for you to tell me to go to sleep again, for I shall not close my eyes until you tell me how you got here!" she declared. "And Billy's here, too, for I heard his voice and thought I must be delirious! Persis, what are you doing in Katalak?"

"Hadn't you better ask Mr. Geddes?" the other laughed softly. "He brought us almost by the scruff of our necks!"

"Uncle Andy!" Jane's eyes opened very wide. "I thought I saw him there on the trestle and Mr. MacLeod, but I was sure it couldn't be true, because Ollie seemed to be there, too, and of course Ollie's in France."

"Suppose Ollie were not in France?" Persis spoke very gently. "Suppose he were here in the next room?"

Jane looked into her friend's eyes and then started up with a wild cry of infinite longing.

"Ollie! Ollie!"

A khaki-clad figure appeared in the doorway and Persis slipped out as he advanced with eager strides to the bed and gathered the girl into his arms.

"Oh, Janey! I thought I had lost you!"

Later, when Janey had wiped away her happy tears and Ollie had cleared his throat they found coherent speech once more.

"I want to know!" demanded Jane. "How is it that you are not in France?"

"Invalided home, worse luck!" her brother responded. "After months of drilling and shifting about I saw about five minutes of the Big Show and then—Bingo! Out of it for good!"

"Oh, Ollie! You weren't wounded?"

"Gassed," he explained cheerfully. "Couldn't get the darned mask on in time and was laid by the heels before I'd gone twenty yards over the top. That was early in June, and I was as right as rain in no time, but my leg had gone back on me, too—that old football injury—and they wouldn't let me get in the game again. Now I've come home to do the hero stunt only to find that my little sister has beaten me to it! It wasn't fair of you, Janey!"

She smiled at his bantering tone, and then her face grew grave.

"I only tried to take your place," she said.

"'Take my place'!" repeated Ollie. "Good heavens, Janey, I couldn't have begun to do what you did! I've been hearing all about it from a mob of battered, howling enthusiasts who apparently worship the ground you walk on! How dared you do it? How dared you deceive everybody and come up here all alone——"

"I had Peddar. Oh, poor Peddar!" Jane started up

in sudden contrition. "How could I have forgotten him! I saw an Italian with a knife——"

"Poor Peddar is in bed in the next room, with an infinitesimal scratch on his side and enough of Uncle Andy's precious Scotch in his tummy to make him weep from sheer joy and relief that his troubles are over. He did, actually. I fancy you led him rather a dance, Janey."

"I'm afraid I did," Jane confessed. "Ollie, I don't know whether I've been ill a day or a week, but do you know any of the boys by name? Do you know who were hurt or killed? You see, I've some particular friends among them, and I'm almost afraid to ask, but I must know! There's Jud Pittinger and Harve Dugdale and Big Jim Bowers——"

"I know them all!" Ollie responded promptly. "Big Jim nearly crushed my hand when he greeted me, and that fat little man for whom you tended store has been here twice to inquire about you. They are neither of them very much the worse for wear, but your friend Dugdale is laid up with a bashed head. However, a large, beaming person whom everyone calls 'Ma' is looking after him, and the doctor says he will pull through all right. Janey," he hesitated. "Our construction engineer, Barney Hoyt—do you know him very well?"

"Of course," Jane flushed. "Did Uncle Andy engage him as 'Barney' Hoyt, Ollie? Do you know the rest of his name? He is J. Barnaby Hoyt, Junior. Uncle Andy will remember about his father."

Ollie whistled.

"I do, myself. He tried to buck Winfield and his

crowd, and went under. He paid off every cent, but he couldn't come back, poor old chap, and so he killed himself."

"He paid every cent? Then there wasn't anything disgraceful about his failure?" Jane cried.

"Good Lord, no! He was the soul of honor!" Ollie stared. "I wish I had known before that this young Hoyt was his son. Uncle Andy didn't make any mistake when he picked him, did he? If it hadn't been for him the road would never have gone through!"

"I know it. He's been splendid!" Jane's eyes shone. "I thought he was killed, but Persis says he was not badly hurt."

"He will be around in a day or two," prophesied Ollie. "If ever there was a psychological moment it was when we dropped anchor in the harbor here, wasn't it? We were just in the nick of time at the trestle!"

"How did you happen to be here?" Jane demanded. "Do call in Uncle Andy and Mr. MacLeod and the Cheevers and let me hear about it from all of you!"

Andrew Geddes came first looking exceedingly stern, but his lips trembled when he kissed her forehead.

"Janetta, you've been a wicked, deceitful girl and after this trick you have played on us I misdoubt that the truth is in you, but I'm proud of you for all that. You're every inch a Gildersleeve!"

"You wouldn't have let me come if I had told you, would you, Uncle Andy?" Jane laughed softly. "Somebody else helped me, though——"

"'Twas me," Adam MacLeod announced in sepulchral tones as he came to the other side of the bed and

grasped her hand. "I've not had a peaceful hour since you cajoled me into that promise! Well I knew that trouble would come of it and I've pictured every way, but never did I think to see you leading a riot!"

"I didn't expect to see myself doing it!" retorted Jane. "I made up my mind when I came up here, though, that I was going to see it through no matter what happened."

"Hello, Janey!" Billy Cheever grinned at her cheerfully from the foot of the bed. "Nice mess you got us all into, wasn't it? Everybody has been jumping on me as if I planned the whole thing, and I never knew what was going on at all!"

"Didn't Persis post you?" demanded Jane.

"Only that you were doing some kind of war work somewhere that Mr. Geddes wouldn't approve of, and that I was not to intimate you weren't with us. Then Ollie appeared at our place in Maine without any warning to surprise you and the fat was in the fire! Ollie was the surprised one instead!"

"Not entirely so," Ollie smiled. "You see I had received a letter in France from Janey dated July eleventh, and telling me what a quiet Fourth you had all had, but it was postmarked May twenty-second, and reached me June nineteenth. I smelled a rat right there."

"Billy mailed that letter!" Persis shamelessly betrayed her husband. "I ran down to Boston to do some shopping and I warned him not to get them mixed! Janey, whatever put it into your head to come up here and work in your own company store, of all things?"

"You did!" Jane laughed. "You told me that the

only practical thing in the world I could do was to sell goods over a counter! But how did any of you discover that I was here?"

"We put two and two together," Andrew Geddes responded dryly. "Just before Oliphant came home I met Mr. Cheever, and when I asked him about you his manner was not what you might call convincing."

"I told you, Janey, that Billy wasn't very good at dissembling!" Persis put in irrepressibly.

"Then Ollie came to me with the tale of that letter and I sent him up to Maine to look into the matter, and he soon learned from Mrs. Cheever that she didn't know where you were and hadn't heard from you for weeks. She could only tell him the little you had told her of your plans, but it was enough to show us that 'twas no war work you had in your bonnet, my dear. On top of it all comes Adam MacLeod with the news that Gordon Winfield owns the Unatika. He could never have discovered that there in the East, for Winfield was solidly entrenched behind his ring of dummies and Adam MacLeod had to admit that the information had reached him from here. 'Twas natural enough that we should want to know which of the outfit had found it out and the way he hemmed and hawed——"

"I told the truth," Adam MacLeod interrupted with dignity. "I said I had sent a special agent up here."

"You did, and it is the customary thing, I suppose, for the manager of a New York office to send a special agent out to the mine without the authority or even knowledge of the company's representative!" Andrew Geddes retorted. "Man, 'twould not hold water! Then

Oliphant shot the accusation at him that *you* were the agent, Janetta, and although he kept his promise to you with his lips, his face gave him away. After that——”

“After that,” Persis broke in again, “two madmen appeared at our camp and gave me twenty minutes to pack! I’ve lived in one dressing-bag——”

“And most of my suit case!” interpolated Billy. “I have nothing in the world but a tooth brush and four collars——!”

“One dressing-bag,” repeated Persis firmly, “for three solid weeks, Janey, and if that is not friendship——”

“I’ve made a lot of trouble for everybody,” Jane said penitently. “But oh, it is so good to see you all here!”

“You made most trouble for Winfield!” exclaimed Ollie. “I would have given half of my interest in the mine to have seen you vamping Ronald!”

“Oh, don’t! He was the most frightful bore! But Persis told me that they were beaten and the right of way is ours. Do you suppose he will offer to sell us the Unatika mine?”

Andrew Geddes chuckled grimly.

“There isn’t any!” he remarked. “There never was. Long ago, before you knew anything about the state of affairs, Janetta, your brother and I had many a business conference concerning the Northern Star at your home, and your friend Mrs. Everton must have spied and listened and carried the news to Gordon Winfield. He sent a man up here, not to discover a mine, but to manufacture the evidence of one as an excuse to fight you for the right of way and if he succeeded, force you to sell the Northern Star at his own price. That was

his only intention in forming the Unatika Company; to ruin you children and get the Northern Star for himself. It has cost him a pretty penny and more than that, for when we have laid the report and proof of his activities before the Boards of both exchanges in New York, he will find himself ruled off, and barred forever from operating under his own name. Moreover, there is law and justice in Alaska for the outrages he has committed against the Northern Star and his outfit almost to a man is clamoring to turn state's evidence now that the game is up. He'll be brought back——"

"He has gone, then?" Jane asked. "He has left Katalak?"

"His yacht sailed the morning after the fight at the trestle."

"The morning after!" she ejaculated. "Why, what day is this? How long have I been ill?"

"Three days, Janey," Persis replied soothingly. "This is Saturday and the fight occurred Wednesday, you know. You weren't really ill, just weak from loss of blood."

"Blood!" Jane glanced down at her bandaged shoulder and arm. "You told me it was a sprain!"

"Persis did not want to frighten you," her brother explained. "You must have been struck by a stray bullet and in the excitement you never noticed it. It isn't serious, Janey, just a flesh wound, but you have taken all the wind out of my sails!"

"Did you tell me the truth about other things?" Jane demanded, sitting up and eying her friend accusingly.

"You said that our—our construction engineer, Mr. Hoyt, was only cut and bruised a little——"

"And so he was!" Persis retorted. "There's a little cut on his head, I believe."

"Seven stitches!" supplemented Billy cheerfully. "Looks like a prize fighter that had lost the purse, but holy mackerel! That chap is game! The doctor couldn't keep him in bed and it was he who went out yesterday to the mines and discovered the truth about the Unatika. He said he had suspected it for some time but couldn't verify it while the other outfit were on the job! There's some class to his speed!"

"I think Janey's talked enough for now," Persis announced authoritatively. "She promised that she would go to sleep again if I let her hear how we all came to be here, and she looks a little tired."

"There is just one more thing that I must know." Jane stayed the stir of departure. "I shall have to learn it some time. Did—did they find Malison?"

"The general superintendent of the Unatika? The man you knocked off the trestle?" Ollie laughed. "No, and they can't find the only jitney in town, either, but the deputy marshal from Juneau has started off on his trail. You only stunned him, Janey, and when he came to, and found that the fight was over he didn't waste any time in making himself scarce. They'll get him, though, and he'll hang for the murder of that Italian, Pietro Graziano."

"That is a pleasant little thought to put her to sleep with," Persis observed, as she herded them out. "Tactful creatures, men are!"

She closed the door and came over to the bed.

"Janey, would you like to see this Mr. Hoyt the next time he calls?"

"He has been here?" Jane asked with unconscious eagerness.

"As soon as he could crawl on Thursday, and three times yesterday. It is wonderful the amount of business he has to discuss with Ollie and Mr. Geddes! If you are good and go to sleep now I will make you as presentable as I can, though there's not a bit of rouge in the whole town! I know because I even asked Mr. Pittinger, and he nearly fainted."

Jane smiled.

"I don't want any," she murmured. "I—I'd rather be just myself; I'm going to be, from now on. I have learned a lot since I came up here about the things that really count, Persis, and nothing else matters."

She slept again, awakening only when Persis laid her hand upon her forehead.

"Mr. Hoyt is here, dear. If you don't feel like seeing him just now——"

The dazed look was swept like magic from Jane's eyes and she sat up in bed so suddenly that she all but bumped her friend's head.

"Give me my hair brush," she demanded. "Oh, I can't use it with only one hand! Don't drag my hair back until it pulls my eyebrows up, whatever you do! Am I so very pale?"

Persis made no response but she smiled quietly to herself as she went about her ministrations. Janey had evidently learned more in Katalak than she had told!

A few minutes later a young man with a bandaged head and battered countenance appeared diffidently in the doorway.

"Mrs. Cheever said that you wanted to see me, Miss Gildersleeve," he said formally. "I did not wish to intrude——"

"Oh, dear!" Jane sighed. "I hoped you had forgotten how rude I was to you the day you called when I only pretended to be ill. *You* were rude to *me*, though, the last time we met; you declined my company in no uncertain terms."

"On the trestle?" His lips tightened. "It was madness for you to come! You might have been killed, but instead you saved my life. Miss Gildersleeve, I do not know what to say to you; I don't know how to express——"

"Then don't, for goodness sake, call me 'Miss Gildersleeve' in that horribly formal manner! I—I just knew you would do this!" Jane spoke in a decidedly aggrieved, pouting tone. "I knew that as soon as you learned who I was you would freeze up like the other time! When you thought I was only Jane Peddar you were so nice and friendly, and now it is all spoiled!"

"The other time?" Hoyt had taken a step nearer the bed and a dawning light came into his eyes.

She looked up at him with a little smile.

"You I. W. W. Thing!" she said softly.

"So it *was* you!" Hoyt exclaimed. "I fancied so at first but I thought I must be mad! You were so different to the fine little lady who was afraid to help the

man she had hurt because her hands might be soiled with blood."

"I'm not different!" Jane protested. "It is only that conditions are, and I had to learn, didn't I? I was on the wrong side of the road that night because I was careless and didn't think; I wouldn't have cared much if I'd realized it. All my life I have felt that I had the right of way in everything because I was Janetta Gildersleeve; I took it as a matter of course. It was only when I saw my own little pampered, falsely secured world falling down about my shoulders that I began to think, and what you said to me that night made me furious but it helped me later. I thought then that you must be a socialistic faddist, but when I came up here and got behind that counter I saw the other side of things; kindness and generosity and chivalry from people I had never even given a thought to before because they belonged to another world! Now do you understand?"

"I think I do," Hoyt said slowly. "I learned it, too, years ago. But you will go back now and be Janetta Gildersleeve once more."

He did not realize that in the innocent glance which Jane bestowed upon him she was reading him like a book. She sighed in queer exasperation, then seeing that the initiative must be hers she drew a deep breath.

"Do you want me to go?" she asked very softly.

The blank amazement in his eyes gave place to so warm and tender a light that her own eyes drooped before it.

"What do you mean?" he asked in turn, somewhat unsteadily. "I—your place is there——"

"Is it? I wonder! I thought that perhaps I might stay here in Katalak until the road is finished if you wanted me to," she repeated in a voice that was little more than a whisper. "Until the road is finished and—and we go on to another job."

"Jane!" He stooped swiftly and gathered her, injured shoulder and all, in a close, infinitely tender embrace. "And I thought you didn't care! I thought you were like the others, in spite of how wonderfully you had proved yourself up here! I had begun to feel that perhaps Jane Peddar might care, but when she became Janetta Gildersleeve I was sure it had been just a dream of mine."

"Jane Peddar does care!" Her arm slipped up about his neck in blissful contentment. "But she will never as long as she lives forgive you for making her propose!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE SINGLE TRACK

ONE morning, a week later, in a rare burst of sunshine, Jane was seated on the porch of the little shack. She was still a trifle weak and wan, but her pallor was shot now and then with vivid blushes, and she hummed a little tuneless song to herself as she swayed back and forth in the squeaky rocker which Ma Heaney had sent up for her especial use.

"I don't see how you ever endured it up here all these weeks!" Persis observed with a shiver. "It is desolate enough in all conscience when the sun shines like this, but when it rains, as it seems to do almost constantly, it is the most unspeakably lonely, dreary place imaginable!"

"I haven't been lonely." Jane smiled as if to herself, and then added hurriedly: "Too busy, you know. Then I've made such good friends——"

"That dreadful fat woman with the bleached hair, and that common dance-hall creature——" Persis began, but Jane interrupted her indignantly.

"Ma Heaney is respected by everyone in Katalak, and she has the biggest heart of anyone I know, while as for Etta, I don't know what I should have done without

her. She's just a girl like you or I, only she hasn't had the advantages that have been ours, but I mean that she shall have as soon as she reaches the East."

"Well, I must say it is a blessing that we are getting you away from such associations," her friend retorted vigorously. "I had no idea, Janey, that you could so easily sink to the level of these surroundings! You seemed so well-poised and self-contained for a girl who had only been out two seasons that I would never have believed you would so soon have forgotten your social traditions."

"I haven't. I've simply risen above them," explained Jane serenely. "We don't even think in the same language any more, you and I, Persis. I don't understand, looking back, how I ever could have been such a narrow-minded, self-satisfied little snob!"

"If you mean to insinuate that I am one simply because I cannot fraternize with the riff-raff of a mining town, I can only say that I think we came at a psychological moment in more ways than one," Persis remarked with dignity. "I am glad for your own sake that we are sailing to-morrow."

Jane drew a deep breath and turned to face her friend squarely.

"I am not sailing with you. I shall be sorry to lose you all, but I am going to remain here in Katalak!"

"You are absolutely mad!" Persis rose from her chair in consternation. "Janey, you can't think what you are saying! What in the world do you mean?"

"Just what I say." Jane smiled very steadily into Mrs. Cheever's eyes, but a deep flush had mounted to

her brow. "I never from the first had the slightest intention of going back with you, but I decided not to tell you until the last moment to avoid needless remonstrances."

The other woman stared half-incredulously at her, and then turned impetuously toward the door of the shack.

"Ollie! Mr. Geddes! Billy!" she called. "Come here this minute. What do you think Janey is trying to tell me?"

Then as the three, followed by Adam MacLeod appeared in the doorway, with Peddar's pale face hovering in the background, she continued:

"She says that she will not sail with us to-morrow! She means to stay on here in this awful place——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" interrupted Andrew Geddes testily. "She should never have been permitted to come, but she accomplished what she set out to do and that isn't any excuse for her to remain here another day! What ridiculous notion is this, Janetta?"

"It isn't ridiculous, Uncle Andy." Jane smiled again in that quiet, aloof way, and then she blushed as she caught sight of a tall figure rapidly approaching. "My work here has only just begun. Of course, we've beaten the Unatika, and I think that Jud Pittinger can get along without me in the store any longer, but I've accepted another position."

"Oh, Jane—miss, I mean!" quavered Peddar. "I beg pardon, I'm sure, miss, but you are never thinking——"

William Cheever's low whistle of astonishment drowned the old man's trembling tones and Adam Mac-

Leod looked the question he could not utter, but Ollie advanced to her chair.

"What sort of position, Little Sister?" he asked gently.

She looked gratefully up at him through a mist of happy tears, and then nodded to Barney Hoyt as he hesitated at the foot of the steps.

"I am just telling the rest that they must sail without me to-morrow," she explained to the new arrival. "I told them that I had accepted another position up here, Barney, but I didn't say that I had had to apply for it myself!"

The young engineer's brown eyes traveled from one to another of them and finally rested on Oliphant Gildersleeve.

"Jane has promised to become my wife," he said simply.

There was a moment of stunned silence, and then Andrew Geddes burst out irrepressibly.

"Preposterous, young man! We'll admit that it is through you her property was saved, but she's a Gildersleeve——"

"And he is the son of J. Barnaby Hoyt," Ollie interrupted suddenly. "However, that wouldn't matter to either of us, Uncle Andrew. He has proven up here that he is better able to take care of her than any of us have been, and she's proved, too, that she knows her own mind. I am glad, Barney Hoyt, although it means losing my little sister. You'll be good to her, I know."

He extended his hand and the engineer grasped it.

"I shall work for her and love her all the rest of

our two lives, Mr. Gildersleeve!" he announced solemnly.

Persis stooped impulsively and kissed Jane.

"I suspected something like this, dear. You talked to me a little when you were half-delirious, you know. But I thought that you meant to return with us and have Mr. Hoyt follow when the road was finished."

She, too, held out her hand to Hoyt, and after a moment Andrew Geddes and Adam MacLeod followed suit, while Peddar looked on in shocked amazement.

"You've taken on an awful responsibility, young man!" MacLeod remarked warningly. "I know by experience that she'll get what she wants in everything and you may as well save your breath as try to dissuade her."

"But that is what I want, too. To give her everything that she desires, always, if it is in my power," the radiant young man averred.

"I misdoubt, in spite of such a daft, reckless speech that Janetta has found her master at last." Andrew Geddes took off his glasses and wiped them clear of the sudden mist which had fogged them. "There's one little detail that has seemed to escape the minds of you two children, however; has it occurred to you that there is no minister nearer than Juneau, and we sail tomorrow."

Jane looked questioningly at Barney Hoyt, who nodded in laughing reassurance.

"We have a thoroughly authorized, perfectly good preacher right here in Katalak," he announced. "I had a talk with him yesterday and although he was somewhat

reluctant to reveal his true character, I managed to persuade him. Here he is now, come to pay his respects."

They glanced up as two men made their appearance, supporting between them a third whose head and eyes were bandaged.

"Heavens, what a wedding!" groaned Persis. "Won't you give up the idea of being married at once, and come home and have a real function in St. Jude's, Janey?"

Jane's declination was lost in Ollie's sudden exclamation:

"But these men—they are only Superintendent Bowers, and Harve Dugdale and your storekeeper, Jud Pittinger, Janey! Surely you cannot mean——"

"The Reverend Judson Pittinger," Jane corrected him softly. "He has taken care of me and guarded me from all harm when he thought me just Peddar's daughter, and I'd rather have him than the rector of the most famous church in Christendom! I'm so glad you came, Mr. Bowers; please put Harve Dugdale here in this big chair. Mr. Pittinger, have you come to tell me that you will officiate for us to-morrow?"

"It will be the greatest honor of my life, ma'am," he responded, and when the embarrassed congratulations of the newcomers had been delivered, he turned to Ollie and Andrew Geddes as they stood a little apart. "I have my papers here, gentlemen, and a—a tribute from my last congregation. I'm only a plain preacher, but if so be that you think I am fitted——"

"Oh, are we all crazy?" cried Persis once more. "This is wonderfully romantic, of course, but for a girl brought up as Janetta Gildersleeve has been, to be

married in a dreadful little shack like this, with no orange blossoms or organ recital, or bridesmaids or supper——”

Jud Pittinger turned mildly deprecating eyes upon her.

“Ma Heaney has the orange blossoms left from one of her own—er—ceremonies, and she and the Chinamen from the de Luxe eating-house are getting up the finest supper that Katalak ever saw, ma’am. The boys have fixed up a band amongst ’em—you could hear ’em practicin’ right now, if the wind was this way, and as for the weddin’ takin’ place here——”

“We’re going to be married in the new storage warehouse,” Jane announced in low but very firm tones. “It’s the only building in town that will hold all the boys, and I want them there, every one! They’re all friends of mine, and they risked their lives for Ollie and me; they have earned the right!”

“But if you would only listen to reason!” Persis urged insistently. “What can we say to overyone at home? If you would only return with us and let Mr. Hoyt follow when the road is done, you would never have to lead this rough, dreadful sort of life again. I’m sure Mr. Geddes or Ollie could use their influence and get him in some big firm as consulting engineer or something in town and you could live as you have always been accustomed to.”

Jane laughed up into her lover’s eyes. Then her small chin came out firmly and she turned to Persis.

“I told you that we didn’t even think alike any more!” she said. “I don’t care what you tell the people at home, nor what they think. I’m out of their lives for good

or unless Barney has to enter a firm of that sort sometime, but it must come through his own efforts alone. We want no preferment or influence or graft. He is his own man, thank God, and he will be so always! We are going to stay here until the road and the terminal are finished and then we are going on together to the next real job that offers. I shall share with him whatever comes throughout our lives!"

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From the point of view of Ma Heaney, at least, the wedding was the greatest social event that Alaska had ever witnessed. Under her able direction the boys had scouted around the country for every flower that reared its stunted but determined head, and the interior of the storehouse was a huge bower of hemlock and Sitka spruce branches. Bighorns and woodland caribou turned on piles over the slow fires in the storage yard for the barbecue, and there were good things galore made by the Chinese cooks whose impassivity was for once lost in expansive smiles.

Mrs. Cheever, making the best of the situation, unearthed a white gown from her husband's bursting suitcase, and in spite of her remonstrances Jane had insisted upon wearing not only Ma Heaney's slightly dilapidated orange blossoms, but a veil of doubtful origin which that lady had produced at the final moment.

As if desiring to make up for the eternal drizzle of her courtship, the sun shone in all its splendor for the little bride as she walked on Andrew Geddes' arm be-

neath turquoise skies to the transformed storehouse. Within, she passed up the narrow lane between the solidly packed masses of men who had fought for her so well, but it is doubtful if she was conscious of the adoring faces, Slavic and Latin, yellow and white and brown, which were turned with one accord to her. Her own eyes were fixed upon the temporary altar of bunting-draped packing cases where Jud Pittinger waited and where before him stood her brother and that other, the man whom she had once called an "I. W. W. Thing!"

But it was all over now. Ma Heaney had clasped her in a stout embrace and shed copious tears of happiness upon her, the feasting and celebrating were done and Jane and Barney Hoyt stood alone together on the wharf watching a great steamer disappear in the soft haze where blue sky and bluer water met.

There were tears in her eyes and she clung rather tightly to Barney's hand, but a little April smile curved her lips.

"You are sure, my darling, that you won't regret? You are sure that the time will not come before I can take you back to it, when you will long for the old things and the old life?" He spoke very softly and low. "It is a rough road that you have chosen to travel with me; a lonely and weary and monotonous one! Your highway has always been smooth and pleasant, peopled with familiar friends and gay with amusement and joyous excitement. It would kill me to think that I had taken you from all that if you tire, dear!"

For answer Jane turned him gently away from the last smudge of smoke which lingered on the horizon

and pointed up-country, where two long lines of rails gleamed side by side until they met and vanished in the foothills.

"A rough road with you?" she repeated. "A shining one, Barney! The old life and the girl who lived it are both dead. They may keep their crowded highway, but I have chosen well; the single track, with you!"

FINIS.

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